

Wanderlust

TRAVEL MAGAZINE

www.wanderlust.co.uk February 2015

Win!
Trips to: Canada,
Rwanda and
South-East Asia...
See pg 4

TOP 50 TRIPS 2015

Including:
Burma, Vietnam,
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Cambodia, Iran,
Zimbabwe,
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China, Greece,
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Exciting Ice-capades
The new Langjökull Ice Cave experience, Iceland, is just one of 2015's most tempting trips

Welcome



What New Year's Resolutions have you made? We have suggested a few on page 24, all of which I heartily embrace (even if I'm guilty of being over-attached to my smartphone!). My only problem with travel plans is procrastination – the shortlisting of the Top 50 New Trips (p26) left me with a mouthwatering list that would take several years to work through.

As ever, we have pushed the boundaries this issue, with reports on Haiti (p50), and India's Kumbh Mela (p116), as well as looking at perennial favourite Jordan (p98). It has been tragic to hear of livelihoods being lost in Africa due to a drastic fall in tourism (p14). Fortunately *Wanderlust* readers appreciate that magical places like the Okavango Delta (p66) are nowhere near the Ebola zone, and there has never been a better time to go – with bargains aplenty.

The start of the year, also brings two great travel events in London – the Adventure Travel Show and Destinations, both to be held at Olympia this year. If you are visiting them do stop by to say hello... we'll see you there!

Lyn

Lyn Hughes
Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

5 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS ISSUE:

- 1 Madeira is more than just package holidays, p16
- 2 That walking the Inca Trail doesn't have to be done in Peru, p35
- 3 That this year we can all publish our own travel book – and make money from it too, p82
- 4 You can experience the Caribbean while still on US soil, p139
- 5 The best place to spot African wild dogs is Okavango's Kwara or Vumbura areas, p78



THE TEAM

What have they been up to this month?



PHOEBE SMITH
♦ EDITOR ♦
Ignoring the bad press that plagues the western half of Hispaniola: Haiti
SEE PAGE 50



SARAH BAXTER
♦ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ♦
Mixing Byzantine history with a trendy youth culture in Thessaloniki, Greece
SEE PAGE 141



TOM HAWKER
♦ PRODUCTION EDITOR ♦
Getting swept up in the sadhus and culture of Kumbh Mela
SEE PAGE 116



ALEX GREGG
♦ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ♦
Proving that Africa isn't off limits and that now is the prime time to visit
SEE PAGE 14

SPECIAL OFFER



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For people with a passion for travel

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In memory of co-founder & publisher **Paul Morrison**

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Brought to you in part by these snappers...



ANDY BARNES

Winner of the Landscape category in *Wanderlust's* 2013 Photo of the Year competition (p98)

Andy's right-place-right-time shot of an incredible cloud formation, taken from a ship ploughing through the Arctic Ocean, won him a photo commission to Jordan

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

Polar!

First great travel experience?

Two months travelling around Australia and New Zealand.

Favourite journey?

Rollercoaster trip across the South Atlantic's Drake Passage, which followed the journey down Iceberg Alley, Antarctica. The scale of the icebergs was unbelievable.

Top five places worldwide?

South Georgia; Antarctic Peninsula; Arctic Circle & the ice pack; New Zealand (South Island); Sydney.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Being a fan of Shackleton's adventures: King Edward Point, South Georgia.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Nepal – I would love to see Everest.

Guilty travel pleasure?

Travelling first class on long-haul flights.



ULRICH LAMBERT

Winner of the Icon category in *Wanderlust's* 2013 Photo of the Year competition (p98)

Ulrich's photo of the Eiffel Tower, illuminated against a pitch-black sky and framed by the Alexandre II Bridge, wowed our judges last year

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

All four – I like diversity and meeting new people.

First great travel experience?

South Morocco.

Favourite journey?

India.

Top five places worldwide?

Varanasi, India; Borobudur temple, Java; Sigiriya, Sri Lanka; Wadi Rum, Jordan; Saint-Aimé-des-Lacs, Québec (a place called Au P'tit Paradis). Where I wish to go next: Bagan, Burma; Iceland; Madagascar; Burning Man festival, USA; and so many other places...

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Swaziland.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Myanmar/Burma.

Guilty travel pleasure?

Local food!



SANDIPAN MUKHERJEE

Winner of the People category in *Wanderlust's* 2013 Photo of the Year competition (p98)

Sandipan took to the streets of Kolkata to get his winning shot – a distinctive image of a Bagbazar *kaan-saaf-wallah* (ear-cleaner) going about his business

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

Mountain. To be precise, the Himalaya, where you'll also find jungle and desert.

First great travel experience?

The dangerous but extremely rewarding trek to Kedar Taal: an emerald lake surrounded by snow-clad peaks, in the Garhwal Himalayas.

Favourite journey?

Ladakh on a motorbike.

Top five places worldwide?

I haven't travelled enough to answer this, but I'm pretty confident I have seen places in India that can make it into any list.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Jordan.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Egypt.

Guilty travel pleasure?

I don't read newspapers or watch TV. I even try not to carry my mobile phone.



ANGELA OSBORNE

Winner of the Wildlife category in *Wanderlust's* 2013 Photo of the Year competition (p98)

When accountant Angela traded money-managing for the Masai Mara, she was able to capture an incredible image: a herd of elephants chasing off a lion

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

Mountain.

First great travel experience?

Australia.

Favourite journey?

I don't like flying, so any journey that is near the end!

Top five places worldwide?

Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya; Spitsbergen (Arctic Norway); Khwai River, Botswana; Iceland; New Forest, Hampshire.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

The polar bear stamp received in Spitsbergen.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

I'd like to go to Alaska – so not technically a stamp!

Guilty travel pleasure?

I must always have tea so I do take back-up teabags.



Official partner of the FCO's Know Before You Go Campaign



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26 Top 50 Trips for 2015

Stuck for where to go next? We have the answer. Whether you fancy an active jaunt, a wildlife close-up, a festival-focused trip or an offbeat adventure, we've scoured the travel brochures to find the best trips on offer in 2015

■ Special features

24 Travel resolutions

Ditch the phone, travel solo, use local guides: just three of the 12 travel resolutions that will inspire your globetrotting in the new year

WIN!

A trip to Atlantic Canada, worth over £8,000! p110

A Cambodia & Vietnam trip p136

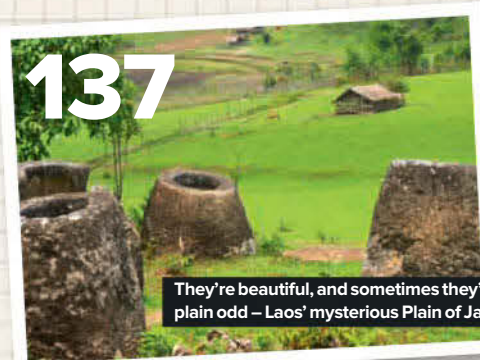
7 days of culture, wildlife & gorilla trekking in Rwanda p80

SmartWool socks p92



"Suddenly there was an explosion of sounds. In front of me a priestess yelled and chanted, her feet kicking up dust as she beat them down on the ground."
Phoebe Smith

50



They're beautiful, and sometimes they're just plain odd – Laos' mysterious Plain of Jars

137



"On warm, tropical evenings, you can wander between salsa clubs, eat empanadas, hear whispers of vodou ceremonies and listen to the locals speaking a blend of Spanish, French and Creole." Phoebe Smith

139

🎯 Miami, p139

🎯 Haiti, p50

GO TO DESTINATIONS TRAVEL SHOW...

Speakers include Kate Adie and more, p21



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50 Haiti Vodou worship, French flavours, the omnipresent beat of drums... Five years on from the devastating earthquake, we discover the Caribbean's 'odd one out'

66 Okavango, Botswana Plan your trip to the UNESCO-listed wetland with our expert guide to the best lodges, camps, canoes and hidden corners

98 Jordan Photo special: join 2013's Travel Photo of the Year winners as they explore Petra, Wadi Rum and beyond

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137 Travel Icon: Plain of Jars, Laos

Amid bomb craters and bruise-coloured hills lie these confounding stone vessels – here's a guide to exploring the giant jars

139 First 24 Hours: Miami Look beyond the Florida city's malls and beaches to find ethnic neighbourhoods and a great gateway to Latin America

141 Short Break: Thessaloniki, Greece Ancient ruins and one of the largest student populations in south-east Europe make Greece's second city a good spot for a hip yet historical city break

BBC Pictures; Circle Image; Hodder Publishing

98 "Even before we touched down, Jordan's desolate, reddish landscape seemed to radiate a strange charm." *Sandipan Mukherjee*

66 "Clouds of dragonflies drifted over the newly forged wetland mosaic, and the air was filled with the exuberant castanet clatter of countless frogs – it was almost as if they were celebrating the miracle of the Okavango in flood." *William Gray*

116 "The Hare Krishnas had been subsumed into a distant cacophony of devotional singing, trains, gridlocked buses, beating tabla drums and the flute-trill of snake charmers." *Mark Stratton*

TALKING HEADS
David Attenborough, p20

"In the 1950s people thought filming a lion catching an impala was impossible. Within 15 years of course we had. After that we knew how to do it. Now we can almost do anything: film at night; at the bottom of the sea; slow things down, speed things up."

360°



V i e w f i n d e r



WATER WONDER

Arctic Canada

Photographer: **Paul Nicklen**

Oceanographer Sylvia Earle has a clear message for travellers: life depends on the ocean, and to save it for future generations of watery wanderers we must love it. That's easily done when faced with shots such as this, a walrus using drifting pack ice to forage for clams north of Hudson Bay. It is just one of the inspirational aquatic images featured alongside the maps, essays and expert commentaries that make up his new book, *Blue Hope*, a lovesong to the seas that will have you pining for the big blue.

Blue Hope: Exploring and Caring for Earth's Magnificent Ocean (National Geographic, £28) is available now.







BEFORE THE BEER Lions Club, Munich

Photographer: **Michael von Hassel**

The calm before the storm... This hall will soon be heaving with some of the 6 million oompah-ing beer-lovers who come from around the world to enjoy Oktoberfest each year (drinking an impressive 7 million litres of beer while they're there), but Michael von Hassel manages to convey the scale of the celebrations in this colour-intensified shot of empty tables. This image features in *Compendium* (teNeues, £80), a collection of von Hassel's richly saturated scenes, from epic mountains to empty cities.

© *Compendium* by Michael von Hassel, published by teNeues, www.teneues.com. Photo © 2014 Michael von Hassel. All rights reserved.





GEMSBOK GLOW

Namib-Naukluft, Namibia

Photographer: **Art Wolfe**

"I raced down a trail to catch the languid curve of the dune as one side was lit by morning sun and the other in deep shade. I managed to frame it so the line ended at a sharply horned gemsbok."

Most of us are lucky if we get one extraordinary image in a lifetime, let alone while out in the Namibian desert. Acclaimed nature photographer Art Wolfe has captured hundreds from around the globe. His latest collection of iconic shots should inspire any budding travel snapper to take their camera off the auto setting.

Earth Is My Witness: The Photography of Art Wolfe (Insight Editions, £65) by Art Wolfe; © Art Wolfe/www.artwolfe.com

Earth Is My Witness; Earth Aware Editions; signed copies available at <http://store.artwolfe.com/>; online at Amazon.co.uk and fine booksellers

■ Readers' Pictures

YOUR PHOTOS

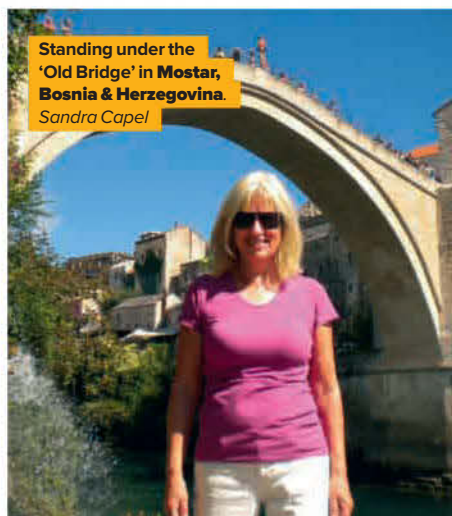
Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk – make us jealous!

Getting quite close to Komodo dragons in **Indonesia** – thank goodness for my long lens (though I still didn't dare give it 'bunny ears').
Nigel Branscombe



Finding 'The Best View in the World' in Little Petra on day five of our trek from Dana to Petra, Jordan.
Susan Piper



Standing under the 'Old Bridge' in Mostar, Bosnia & Herzegovina.
Sandra Capel

Admiring Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania.
Caroline Martin



Mountain-biking from Manali to Leh, India.
Paul Mathieson





I saved my *Wanderlust* for the journey to **Nepal**. While reading it on the plane I noticed the article on the **Dashain festival**, which we were due to visit. At the last minute I remembered to snap a picture at **Boudhanath Stupa** while watching the locals erect the prayer flags.

Pamela Boothman



Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including an adaptable **Wool Buff®** – a Merino wool travel accessory to keep you warm throughout the winter (RRP £25). But can you do better than Pamela (above)? We want to see where your *Wanderlust* takes you and where you take your *Wanderlust*!

Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at @wanderlustmag or email it to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk.



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Admiring the dragon-blood trees of **Socotra, Yemen** – truly, the 'Galápagos of the Indian Ocean'. The red resin that gives the trees their name is exuded from the bark after wounding; it is used for medicine, dyes, varnish and incense.

Justin Cutcliffe

In the bazaar in **Isfahan, Iran**.
Marie Lippens, Belgium



12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your new year essentials: Attenborough on *Life*; classic Cuban comfort food; travel resolutions; fly to Funchal; New Zealand's Waitangi Day...

1 ■ Travel issues Africa is BIG – and needs you!

Whether it's down to geographical ignorance, bad press or fear, travellers are avoiding all of Africa because of Ebola – but now is actually a great time to go

Acacia-studded plains, birds, the Big Five – the Masai Mara is a bucketlist spot. But that hasn't stopped travellers from avoiding Kenya, or cancelling planned trips, as a result of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa – at a time when Kenya is desperate for visitors.

"People would rather stay away from all of Africa, even if some parts are further from Ebola than we are in the UK," says Eleanor Dunkels of Expert Africa (expertafrica.com). Like many other tour operators, the company saw its safari bookings drop by half between August and mid-November this year, compared to the same period in 2013.

There have been confirmed Ebola outbreaks in just three of the continent's 50-plus countries (Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia) plus a handful of cases in Mali, Nigeria and Senegal, not to mention the USA and Spain. The FCO advises against 'all but essential travel' to the outbreak nations, but has issued no other Ebola-related warnings. There hasn't been a single case of Ebola in southern or East Africa according to the World Health Organisation.

The three outbreak countries border each other, and are roughly 5,300km from Nairobi and 5,700km from Cape Town; to put that in context, the UK's Isle of Wight is 4,800km from Sierra Leone. More flights link West Africa with Europe than the rest of Africa.

Paul Goldstein, Exodus guide and co-owner of Kicheche Camp in the Mara, reckons the problem is down to negative images of the whole continent: "Rapacious press has completely jaundiced people's common sense.

'Rapacious press has completely jaundiced people's common sense'

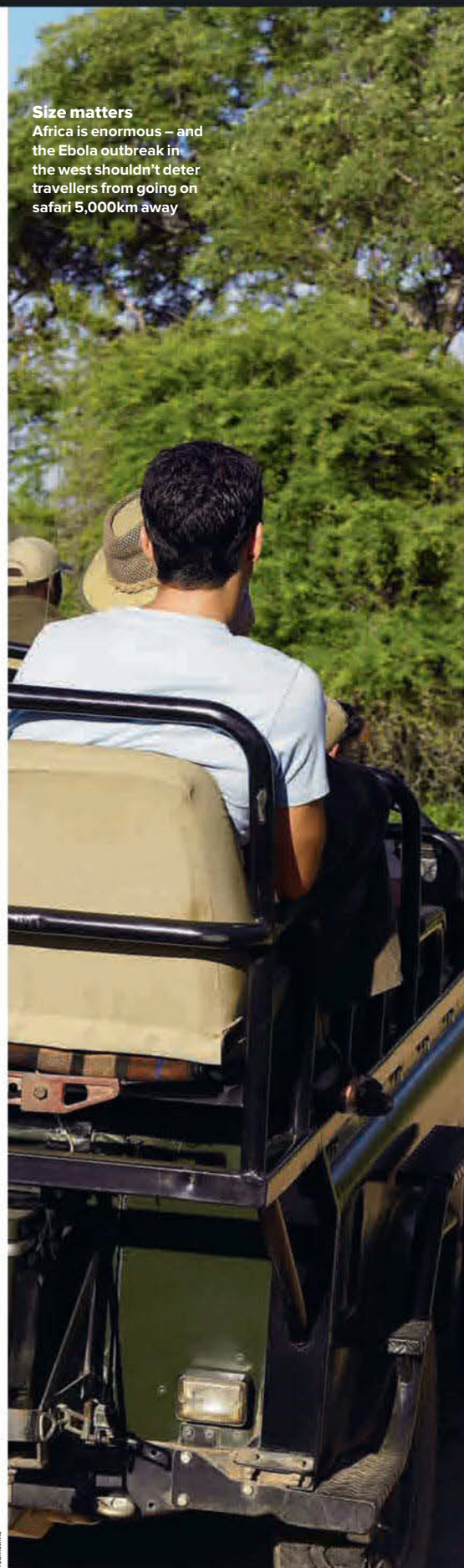
There are many ailments that can affect anyone in Africa – malaria, dengue and typhoid kill thousands – but ignorance and scaremongering has made people think an outbreak thousands of miles away could be dangerous.

"I always ask the same question, be it an outbreak of disease or a terrorist incursion: how many tourists were affected? Exactly."

In fact, now is a great time to visit Africa – travellers will find lower prices and fewer people. Eleanor adds: "For those who love wilderness experiences and a good deal, now is the best time to go on a safari."

Size matters

Africa is enormous – and the Ebola outbreak in the west shouldn't deter travellers from going on safari 5,000km away





■ The Nitty Gritty Don't dismiss these...

Go beyond the headlines... here are five countries that many travellers are overlooking – but shouldn't be – because of troubles in neighbouring regions:

1 Jordan The Syrian conflict has affected tourism here – but most of it is safe: The FCO advises against all but essential travel to within 3km of the Syrian border, but icons such as Petra are well out of the way.

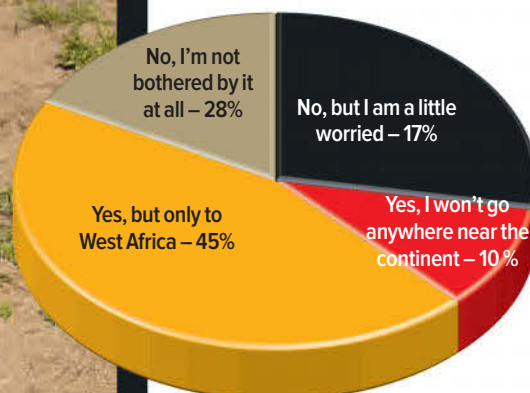
2 Egypt Following a period of unrest, Egypt is certainly open for business. The FCO advises avoiding North and South Sinai (excluding Sharm), the area west of the Nile Valley and Delta Regions, and travel within 50km of the Libyan border, but the main sites need you!

3 Finland Post-Crimean crisis, some travellers are avoiding Finland, which shares a border with Russia. But according to the FCO, the country is completely safe.

4 Kenya Attacks from Islamist insurgents from Somalia have seen travellers look elsewhere for their safaris. However, only the region bordering Somalia, plus Lamu County, Mombasa Island, Garissa District and the Eastleigh area of Nairobi are off-limits.

5 South Korea North Korean antics shouldn't put you off the South. An armistice agreement monitored by the UN has maintained general peace between the two Koreas for over 50 years.

■ Online reader poll
Has the Ebola outbreak stopped you from travelling to Africa?



New Routes

GO NOW...

Lavadas lovers

A hiking trail near Pico do Arieiro



2

Find whales and walking in Funchal

Why go?

There's more to Madeira than package holidays. Volcanically formed, and spectacularly rugged, this Portuguese outpost actually offers exciting walks, horse rides and plenty of marine activity. Also, its climate is mild year-round – so when new easyJet flights to Funchal launch in February, you can escape the winter chill for 18°C highs.

Funchal, the island's capital, is a hillside tumble of terracotta

rooftops, cobbled streets and bustling markets. Explore its Zona Velha (Old Town) for a dose of culture and view the city from above by taking the cable-car up to Monte. Then board a boat at Funchal Marina to try to spot some cetaceans: several species are present year-round, such as sperm and pilot whales and bottlenose dolphins.

Inland, it's all about the *levadas*. A 2,150km network of these irrigation channels zigzags across the island, through dense forest,

banana groves and vineyards. Miles of hiking footpaths follow the levadas, while peak-baggers can tackle Pico Ruivo (1,861m), Madeira's highest point. You can also explore on horseback; try the stables at Quinta do Riacho (quintadoriacho.com), in Santo da Serra.



Where to stay?

Nab a room just a short stroll from the sea. Surrounded by beautiful gardens and ancient trees, Vila Vicência offers

a comfy, family feel. B&B from €60pn (£47.50); vilavicencia.com



Get there now!

EasyJet flights from Edinburgh and Manchester to Funchal launch 3 and 14 Feb respectively; fares from £36 each way; easyjet.com



Or how about these...

Qatar Airways will use its new double-decker Airbus A380 to fly Heathrow-Bangkok from 5 January; qatarairways.com

Gear

3 BUY THIS...
powermonkey explorer 2
£79, Powertraveller.com

Waterproof, strong, *Wanderlust* readers get 10% off... The new powermonkey explorer 2 may be on the heavy side (286g), but it's ideal for charging a variety of electronics on the go, from smartphones and tablets to cameras and GPS devices. It's designed to withstand extreme weathers too. Enter 'WANDERLUST' at the checkout for a discount.

Film

4 WATCH THIS...
Wild
Out in cinemas, 16 Jan

What do you do when your life goes to death, sex and drug-fuelled guano? Well, if you're Cheryl Strayed, you hit the 1,700km Pacific Crest Trail, despite not having a metre of trekking experience to her ill-fitting boots. Based on the true story, the raw performance from Reese Witherspoon even manages to rival the dramatic PCT scenery.

Download

5 TRY THIS...
Seasonal Cities app
Free on App Store, Seasonalcities.com

Complement guidebooks with this app that offers tailored travel advice in 11 iconic cities. Whether it's spring, summer, autumn or winter, this handy trip planner lets you browse the best attractions, events or places to eat, drink and sleep for the season, basing suggestions on the weather. Don't be afraid to do extra research though: the app recommendations can be pricey.

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World Food

EAT THIS...



6

Cuban comfort food tastes of nostalgia

Picadillo may sound like some sort of cross between a small peak and an armoured mammal, but it's actually a fragrant, ground-meat stew – from 'picar', the Spanish word for 'to mince'. However, in Cuba it certainly has the cultural stature of a mountain: it is the country's favourite comfort food, and a common fixture on tables across the island, from Havana to Baracoa. Barely a week goes by without it popping up on the family menu.

At its most basic, picadillo is a mix of ground beef, tomatoes, olives, herbs and raisins for sweetness. Sometimes it's served with rice; sometimes it's used as a filling for pastries, empanadas or fritters. Some chefs add potatoes; some top it with

a fried egg to make picadillo al caballo. It's a versatile dish, which can be customised with different ingredients. But whatever form it comes in, it's undoubtedly one of the region's most popular dishes.

Versions of picadillo exist across the Caribbean and Latin America, but Cubans have long claimed it as their own. Perhaps this is because, in Cuba, picadillo is permeated with nostalgia. It takes people back to the island's pre-Revolutionary era, offering a taste of old Cuba.

"It's my favourite recipe to make for my Cuban friends who miss home," explains Ana Sofía Peláez, the author of new recipe and food history book, *The Cuban Table*. "And also for my non-Cuban friends who don't know what they're missing."

TOP TIP

Picadillo is delicious with fried ripe plantains: cut the ends off the plantains, peel them, slice them in half lengthways and fry them in a skillet until browned and caramelised.

PICADILLO CLÁSICO

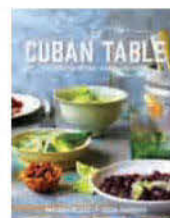
Serves 6

60ml extra virgin olive oil
1 medium onion, diced
1 large green pepper, deseeded and diced
3 large garlic cloves, minced
1 tsp kosher salt
1 tsp dried oregano
½ tsp ground cumin
¼ tsp freshly ground pepper
2 tbsp tomato puree
450g lean ground beef
50g diced tomatoes in juice
60ml dry white wine
50g pimiento-stuffed green olives, halved
50g dark raisins
1 tbsp capers
1 tbsp sherry vinegar
2 tbsp fresh flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
2 tbsp fresh oregano, finely chopped

Method

1. Heat the oil in a skillet over a medium heat.
2. Add onion, pepper, garlic, salt, oregano, cumin, pepper. Sauté until onion is translucent (6-8mins), then add tomato paste and stir until well combined.
3. Raise the heat and brown the beef. Stir in the tomatoes, wine, olives, raisins and capers. Reduce the heat to a simmer, stirring occasionally for 15-20 minutes.
4. Stir in the sherry vinegar and adjust seasonings to taste.
5. Garnish with parsley and oregano.

Recipe from *The Cuban Table* by Ana Sofía Peláez and Ellen Silverman (St Martin's Press LLC, £25), out now.





{ Explore like
a local



A Journey Through Vietnam

9 day tour
From £1499. Departing May 2015.

“Earlier this year I travelled from north to south Vietnam, and what an incredible journey this was! I loved the contrast between the bustling cities and ancient temples, as well as the colourful markets and local cuisine. I would recommend experiencing Hoi An like a local and exploring the charming old quarter by bicycle.”

Tejal Raol, Hayes and Jarvis Destination Specialist

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Price is per person and is based on 2 adults sharing standard accommodation on A Journey Through Vietnam tour, board basis as per itinerary, departing London Heathrow 26 May 2015. Offer is correct at time of going to print and is subject to availability and change.

*Calls are charged at your providers' local or national rate. Mobile and other providers' charges may vary. ATOL protected 1275.

7 ■ Five minutes with... MEET SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

The travel legend talks BBC *Life Story*, innovation – and what's coming next

You and the Natural History Unit team are constantly innovating.

One wonders when it's going to stop, of course. For the last 50 years I've thought, I'll do something next year and then that's it, but I suppose there must be something out there that I haven't thought of!

In the 1950s people thought filming a lion catching an impala was impossible. Within 15 years of course we had. After that we knew how to do it. Now we can almost do anything: film at night; at the bottom of the sea; slow things down, speed things up. It's interesting now that with electronic cameras people can make their own movies – so it's up to us to keep ahead of them!

Is it a danger that we now almost take seeing these things for granted?

We have to cope with the fact that, with computer-generated images, you can make anything happen. In *Life Story*, you can actually see it because there's a 'making of' section to show people that it is not a fake.

There's footage in *Life Story* of two cheetah hunting an impala. Tell us more.

We've seen cheetahs hunt before but this clip had extraordinary intimacy. Unusually, the camera wasn't on a long lens, you feel as though you're right in there – and that's because the cameraman was. He had habituated these wild cheetah cubs since they were small. They knew him and took no notice of him so he was able to be along side just as soon as they caught that impala.

The other thing that makes it different is that it is a key moment in their lives; this is the first time they hunt for themselves. Had they failed, they would be doomed to death; this is when they became adults.

Do we have a responsibility to make young people excited about nature?

The UN has produced a figure which says over 50% of the population are now urbanised – cut off, to some degree, from the



'With electronic cameras people can make their own movies – it's up to us to keep ahead of them'

natural world. [Exciting the young] is one of the jobs broadcasting can do. It's a paradox: we are divorced from the natural world yet through the BBC, we know more about it.

You're doing a birds of paradise series – is this a project of passion?

When I was about 12 I read a book by Alfred Russell Wallace, the first man to see birds of paradise display in the wild. I thought that must be the most wonderful thing in the world. [The series is also] about the legends around the birds. For instance, the scientific name of a species I love means 'without legs'; in the 16th century the first birds that came across didn't have legs, because they had been cut off by traders in New Guinea. For another 100 years serious scientists in the west thought that the birds lived in paradise, floating in the skies, living among the gods.

And another upcoming series involves a dinosaur bone?

It's in Argentina, and is the biggest dinosaur that has ever been discovered. Compared to the one in the Natural History Museum, this one is about half as long again. They asked, would you like to make a film about it? And I said, are you kidding?!

Sir David's latest series, *Life Story*, is now available on DVD and Blu-ray (£14-18, BBC)

■ The Big Debate

8 Are maps still useful? Or are they now useless, superseded by newer technology? We asked for your opinions...



YES

Alan Taylor,
Wanderlust
reader

"Maps: couldn't live without them. I was looking at them as soon as I could read and have barely stopped since.

"For travel in the dreaming, planning and actual stages; for understanding books I'm reading or television programmes I'm watching; for working out the lives of ancestors (as a keen family historian); and if none of these suit, just for idle enjoyment.

"Road atlases are part of the fun – I don't have and don't want a sat nav."

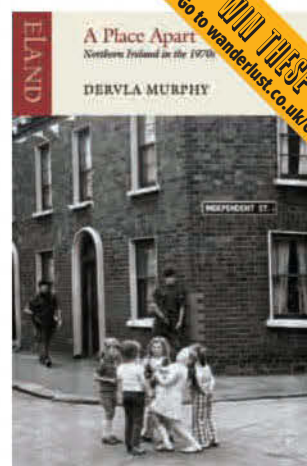
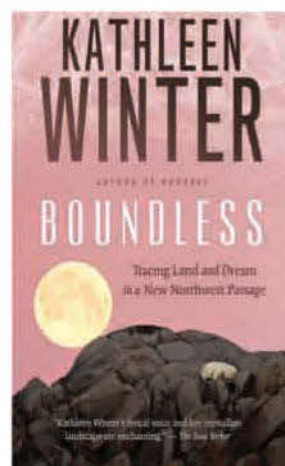
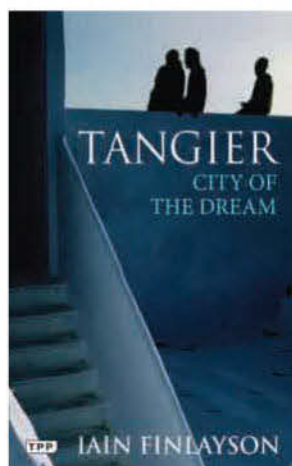
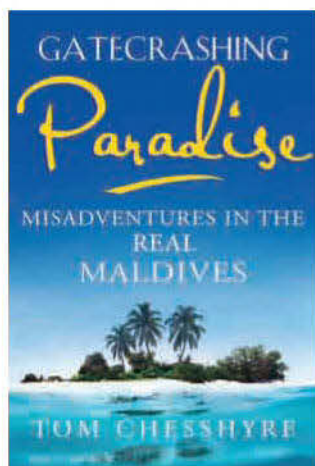


NO

Matthew Morris,
Wanderlust
reader

"I used to buy maps, especially if we hired a car somewhere, but nowadays I don't bother. I have a great affection for maps, but I stopped buying them because too many times I got to the end of a holiday and I'd hardly used them. If I know the route I'm taking, and I'm using public transport then there is little need for a map. I find the level of detail I require these days can be typically met using the internet or in guidebooks. The only maps I buy now are walking maps for trekking."

Join the debate at
www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust



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■ Read this...

9 From the Arctic to Indian Ocean

This month's top picks cover the globe, and the centuries

The honeymoon haven that is the Maldives goes through the big D-I-V-O-R-C-E in Tom Chesshyre's *Gatecrashing Paradise* (Nicholas Brealey, £11). Chesshyre, one of the most dependably interesting modern travel writers, explores the offbeat atolls of this sinking archipelago, wandering beyond the five-star resorts to uncover an authentic idyll just as nourishing – and an Indian Ocean's worth of paranoia and corruption.

Iain Finlayson finds a fair bit of corruption in *Tangier: City of the Dream* (Taurus, £12; originally published 1992), which chases the

city's Dionysian literary refugees – Bowles, Burroughs, Capote, Orton – amid narrow souqs and into smoky backrooms, away from the censorious eyes of the authorities elsewhere. Finlayson explores the city's exotic buffet of hedonism and acceptance: a history and hangover in one book.

The Northwest Passage – the Holy Grail of Victorian explorers (and businesses) – has been back in the news with the discovery of one of the Franklin Expedition's doomed ships. Kathleen Winter finds herself on a sturdier vessel for *Boundless* (Jonathan Cape, £17), exploring the changing landscape of

the route and the people who exist along it, contrasting it to her own relationship with Arctic Canada. If the latter aspect – slightly earnest – doesn't quite work, the former makes up for it.

A brilliant balance of place and personal can be found in *A Place Apart* (£13), Dervla Murphy's attempt to get to grips with Northern Ireland in the mid-70s by cycling it – a gripping and essential history. Along with John Freely's loose scrapbook of *Stamboul Sketches: Encounters in Old Istanbul* (£13), Murphy's is the latest of Erland's fabulous collection of travel re-releases.

10 What's On UK EVENTS

ADVENTURE TRAVEL SHOW

London, 17-18 Jan
www.adventureshow.com
Olympia London. Tickets £8 (advance), £10 (door). *Wanderlust* readers get tickets for £5 – use code 'WANDERLUST' online. All visitors receive £10 to spend on the *Wanderlust* stand.

Head to the UK's leading adventure travel event! Meet experts and adventurers such as Sir Ranulph Fiennes and Doug Scott. Also, book a place to try one of the 14 exclusive travel writing, photography and filmmaking workshops led by the *Wanderlust* team. There are seminars on everything from blogging, to book publishing and more. There are only 25 places in each seminar so be quick; seminars cost £40 (including show entry); subsequent seminars cost £20 each.

DESTINATIONS TRAVEL SHOW

Manchester, 15-18 Jan
London, 29 Jan-1 Feb
www.destinationshow.com
EventCity, Manchester / Olympia, London. Tickets from £11 (under 12s free). *Wanderlust* readers have received two free tickets in this issue!

Meet the *Wanderlust* team and visit our Travel Photo of the Year exhibition at the UK's biggest and longest-running travel show! If you come along to the London show – now at Olympia – on Thurs 29 Jan, you'll find out the winners of our 2015 Readers' Travel Awards, with the big reveal of which images clinched the prizes in our annual Travel Photo of the Year competition happening the next day (30 Jan). And if all that's not enough, meet travel broadcaster Simon Reeve,

adventurer Levison Wood and extreme environment athlete Richard Parks in conversation at the Stanfords' Travel Writers Festival – you'll be planning the trip of your lifetime before you know it.

SPEAKERS FROM THE EDGE:

SIR CHRIS BONINGTON
Various locations, 20 Jan-17 Apr
www.speakersfromtheedge.com

This rescheduled tour sees Britain's best-known mountaineer, Sir Chris Bonington, bring to life over 60 years spent pioneering ascents and leading some of the world's greatest mountain expeditions including 19 Himalayan forays – four to Everest.

BRISTOL WILDERNESS LECTURES

Bristol, Feb
www.wildernesslectures.com
Chemistry Theatre, University of Bristol. From 7.30pm; tickets from £9.

4 Feb Andy Cave will take you on his own journey from 'Miner to Mountaineer' –

how a coal miner came to pioneer mountain ascents during his travels in the Himalaya and beyond.

18 Feb BBC TV presenter, marine biologist and travel writer Monty Halls presents 'Dive Mysteries', featuring tales of his international underwater expeditions searching for answers amid the hidden secrets of the deep.

CIRCLING THE MIDNIGHT SUN: JAMES RAFFAN

Various venues, Scotland, 2-5 Feb
www.rsgs.org
Aberdeen (2 Feb), Dundee (3 Feb), Dunfermline (4 Feb); Glasgow (5 Feb); Edinburgh (5 Feb). All 7.30-9pm except Glasgow, 2.15-4pm.

Lovers of all things Polar will feel right at home during this talk tour. Arctic adventurer, author and geographer James Raffan presents an engaging insight into the circumpolar world, serving up heartwarming stories and anecdotes about its people, societies and the ever-changing landscapes.

Instant Expert

KNOW YOUR... WAITANGI DAY

Happy haka
Maori perform a haka as part of the Waitangi day celebrations



11

Military tattoos, thigh-bashing *haka*, whitebait patties – New Zealand's Waitangi celebrations showcase the country's unique culture

Banish the post-Christmas blues by heading to New Zealand this February. As Santa season draws to a close, another holiday starts to gain momentum, as Kiwis build up to the 175th anniversary of the Waitangi Treaty. Signed in 1840, it is considered by many to be the country's founding document.

Why is it important?

On 6 February 1840, Maori chiefs and representatives of the British Crown gathered together at Waitangi on the Bay of Islands. The treaty – signed in the grounds of the house belonging to James Busby (the 'father of New Zealand wine') – recognised New Zealand as part of the British Empire, and granted Maori the same rights as *pākehā* (European settlers) as well as official ownership of their lands.

OK, so what happens these days?

Over the past century, Waitangi Day celebrations have grown hugely. Since 1974 it's been a public holiday, when people of all cultures come together for a range of celebrations.

The biggest event is the three-day festival held at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds in Northland (waitangi.org.nz). This features traditional Maori performances and *pākehā* speeches, food and craft stalls, live music, a Royal Navy 21-gun salute and a dawn service in Te Whare Rūnanga, the wood-carved meeting house.

Anywhere else?

Auckland hosts an impressive traditional Maori celebration at Okahu Bay, the spot where, in 1841, Governor Hobson was invited to build the city by Maori chiefs. Hundreds of yachts and wooden *waka*

(canoes) arrive in the bay, where they're greeted by a traditional *haka powhiri* dance and chant.

On the west coast of North Island, Kawhia celebrates with its stomach by hosting Kai Fest (kawhiakaifestival.co.nz). Held on the first weekend in February, it is a celebration of traditional and contemporary *kai* (Maori food) – from underground-baked *hangi* to *inanga* (whitebait patties).

What else can I do?

February means summer in New Zealand, so get out and explore North Island. Try tackling Mount Tongariro: the time-poor should try the Alpine Crossing – reputedly the 'world's best day walk', via steaming emerald lakes and eerie moonscapes; if you have more time, opt for the three- to four-day Circuit, for more dramatic scenery – and fewer other people.



From 10th to 14th March 2015

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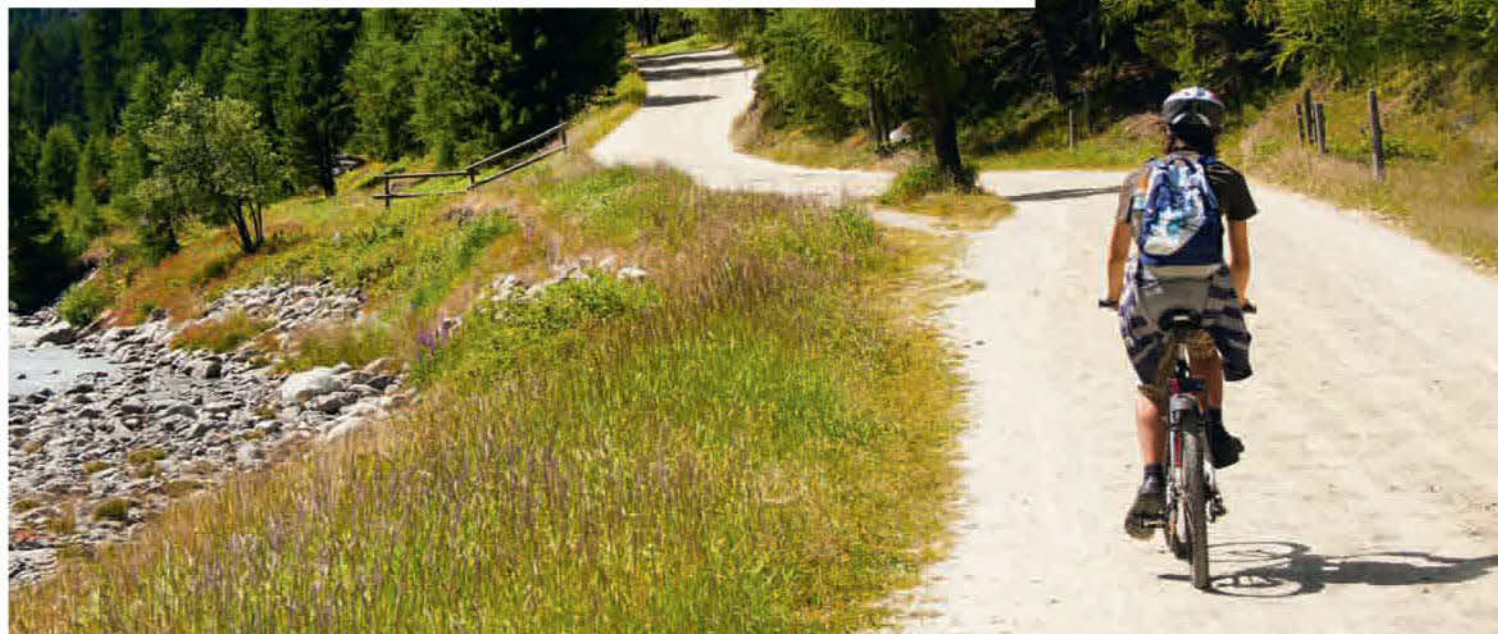
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12 Be Inspired TRAVEL RESOLUTIONS FOR 2015

Make some promises you really will want to keep to ensure guaranteed adventures in the new year...



1 I WILL TRY SOMETHING NEW

Cycling, microlighting, baking, batiking, paddleboarding, perfume-making – whatever! In 2015 I will have a go at something I've never done before, something that helps me delve into a destination, understand what makes it tick or is just jolly good mind-expanding fun.

2 I WILL USE MORE LOCAL GUIDES

Yes, I can explore on my own. But sometimes – if not all times – I will explore with a local guide, who will better bring the place to life for me, and likely point out things I would never have known or noticed. And, if I meet a really good guide, I'll be sure to nominate them for the 2015 *Wanderlust* World Guide Awards!

3 I WILL REMEMBER TO LOOK UP

As 2015 has been designated the International Year of Light, and because March 2015 sees a total solar eclipse occur over the Atlantic, I will reengage with the sky. Plus, there's a growing recognition that such a thing might be good for me: apparently, all the unnatural light of big cities disrupts our daily rhythms, and is associated with processes that may result in chronic disease. I will prescribe myself a regular dose of dark skies – be they in Northumberland or Namibia.



4 I WILL HAVE A MICRO-ADVENTURE

I will not mope when I'm not travelling. Instead, I will fill gaps between the big trips with micro-adventures – whether that means camping (carefully) atop the hill near my house, swimming down a nearby river or going for a hike in the dark. For a spot of inspiration see alastairhumphreys.com.

5 I WILL DEMAND ANSWERS

Before I book my next trip, I will be sure to ask questions of my tour operator first. I will make sure I find out what their sustainability policies are, how they help local communities and how they look out for the environment. Then I will only book with companies that are able to prove their commitment to more sustainable travel.



6 I WILL CONNECT WITH A LOCAL

With the rise and rise of websites such as Airbnb and HouseTrip, and with the emergence of in-home dining (where local people host a dinner party for a group of travellers), there are new ways to engage with local people in foreign countries. I will embrace these opportunities to get a different take on a destination.

7 I WILL KNOW MY RIGHTS

If things go pear-shaped, I will know what to do about it. I'll get up on my rights in the instance of my flight being delayed or cancelled; I'll memorise my bank's emergency number in case my card gets stolen; I'll carry my EHIC and know what it covers; I'll take out good travel insurance and know how to claim on it.

8 I WILL TRAVEL LIGHT

I will endeavour to pack all I need into my hand luggage – to avoid extra airline fees, but also to help me be more spontaneous; it'll also teach me to be creative with one pair of shorts, one T-shirt and a sarong!

9 I WILL PUT DOWN MY DEVICES

Yes, I will travel with a camera and a smartphone. But I won't bury my head in them at all times. Some days I will leave them back at the hotel; I will head out to explore without a pre-ordained plan or access to Google maps. I will look at the view/monument/marketplace through my eyes, not a lens.

10 I WILL SEIZE THE DAY

I won't put off that trip of a lifetime. Even if that means saving up from now until November, I'll book my dream adventure in 2015.

After all, you don't regret the things you do, just the things you don't. No excuses. This is the year!

11 I WILL LEARN FIVE PHRASES

I will not travel anywhere without learning at least five phrases in the local language: 'hello', 'please', 'thank-you', 'yes' and, maybe, 'where is the bar?'.

12 I WILL GO SOLO

If I can't find someone to travel with, I won't wait until I do – I'll travel on my own. And if I am travelling with someone else, I'll find time on that trip to make a moment just for me – be it a day-trip away or an hour for a coffee – so I can travel without compromise and bond with the place by myself.

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A silhouette of a person wearing a traditional conical hat is positioned on the left, holding a long pole. To their right, a large, dome-shaped fishing net is partially submerged in the water. The scene is set against a vibrant sunset sky, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a warm orange and yellow glow. The water in the foreground reflects the sky and the silhouettes of the person and the net. The background shows distant, dark mountains.

50 NEW TRIPS 2015

**Stuck in a travel rut? Need some inspiration
for your next trip? Then look no further:
we've uncovered the very best new
adventures, from Armenia to Zimbabwe,
and everywhere between**

NEW FRONTIERS

Be a travel pioneer on these truly fresh tours – and then brag about it afterwards

HAITI

Be Caribbean curious

£50 OFF Few tour operators venture to Haiti, but Exodus is one of them, and its *Haiti Revealed* trip will uncover some of the pristine beaches, colourful art and mysterious cultures that the offbeat Caribbean nation has to offer. Stay in charming hotels, explore UNESCO-listed forts and take part in a vodou ritual. See p50 for more Haiti inspiration.

WHO: Exodus (0845 863 9600, exodus.co.uk)

WHEN: 25 Jan, 8 Mar, 31 May, 8

Nov, 6 Dec 2015

HOW LONG: 12 days

HOW MUCH: From £2,399 (incl flights)

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SRI LANKA

Blaze a trail north

£50 OFF Sri Lanka's north was isolated for 25 years during the country's Civil War. Now the fighting is over, Bamboo Travel is going in: its *The Undiscovered North of Sri Lanka* trip explores the previously off-limits region. Journey from Colombo to

Wilpattu (for a private safari) and the ancient capital of Anuradhapura before reaching Jaffna's temples and islands (pictured below), to discover a culture quite distinct from the rest of Sri Lanka. On the return south, hit other highlights including the rock-top fortress of Sigiriya.

WHO: Bamboo Travel (020 7720 9285, bambootravel.co.uk)

WHEN: Flexible

HOW LONG: 15 days

HOW MUCH: From £2,195 (incl flights)

ICELAND

Delve into a new ice cave

£50 OFF The Langjökull Glacier is Iceland's second-largest ice cap and, from 2015, it will be home to the world's largest manmade ice structure. The new Langjökull Ice Cave (pictured) reaches 300m into, and 30m

below, the surface, permitting an intimate look at glaciology and the effects of global warming. Discover the World is offering *Ice Cave in Langjökull Glacier* excursions; these include a monster truck ride over the mountains before you enter the cave to see its wonders – from its blue

ice to the layer of ash remaining from Eyjafjallajökull's 2010 eruption.

WHO: Discover the World (01737 214250, discover-the-world.co.uk)

WHEN: Daily departures, Jun-Oct 2015

HOW LONG: From 2.5hrs

HOW MUCH: From £100 (excursion only) ▶



Previous spread Getty







BURMA & THAILAND

Overland in Asia

Burma only really opened to overland trips in 2014. For 2015, Dragoman has created a fast-paced *Yangon to Bangkok* overland itinerary so the time-poor can easily explore the region's delights in an action-packed nine days. Travelling aboard a local truck, stop off at the iconic Golden Rock (*below*), one of Burma's holiest shrines; tour spectacular Yangon city and Kandawgyi Lake; spend a night on the Andaman Coast; visit Thanbyuzayat Allied War Cemetery; and cross over the River Kwai to Thailand.

WHO: Dragoman (01728 885503, dragoman.com)

WHEN: 3 Feb, 31 Mar, 14 Nov 2015

HOW LONG: 8 nights

HOW MUCH: £910 (excl flights)

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

See an unrecognised 'country'

£50 OFF A little-known enclave, fiercely fought over by Armenia and Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence from both in 1992 – though most of the world doesn't recognise it as a country. Regent Holidays is one of the few tour operators to visit this (non)destination; its *Pioneering Nagorno-Karabakh* tour reveals the region's beauty – including views of snow-capped Mount Ararat – as well as its cultural richness, which it hides within monasteries, fortresses and cities such as war-ravaged Shushi.

WHO: Regent Holidays (020 7666 1244, regent-holidays.co.uk)

WHEN: 21 Sept 2015

HOW LONG: 10 nights

HOW MUCH: £1,590 (incl flights)

SOUTH KOREA

Cycle a new path

£50 OFF In 2015, a 3,000km network of bike trails across South Korea will be completed, making it one of the most up-and-coming destinations for cycling holidays. So put your pedal-power to the test on World Expeditions' *Korea Cycle Tour*. Ride through the busy streets of Seoul before heading out into the tranquil countryside, along the banks of the Han River. Stay in a traditional Hanok house, soak in the steamy Adong Hot Springs and refuel with flavour-packed Korean cuisine.

WHO: World Expeditions (0800 0744 135, worldexpeditions.co.uk)

WHEN: 2 May, 19 Sept 2015

HOW LONG: 8 nights

HOW MUCH: £1,990 (excl flights)

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Be first up the Balkans

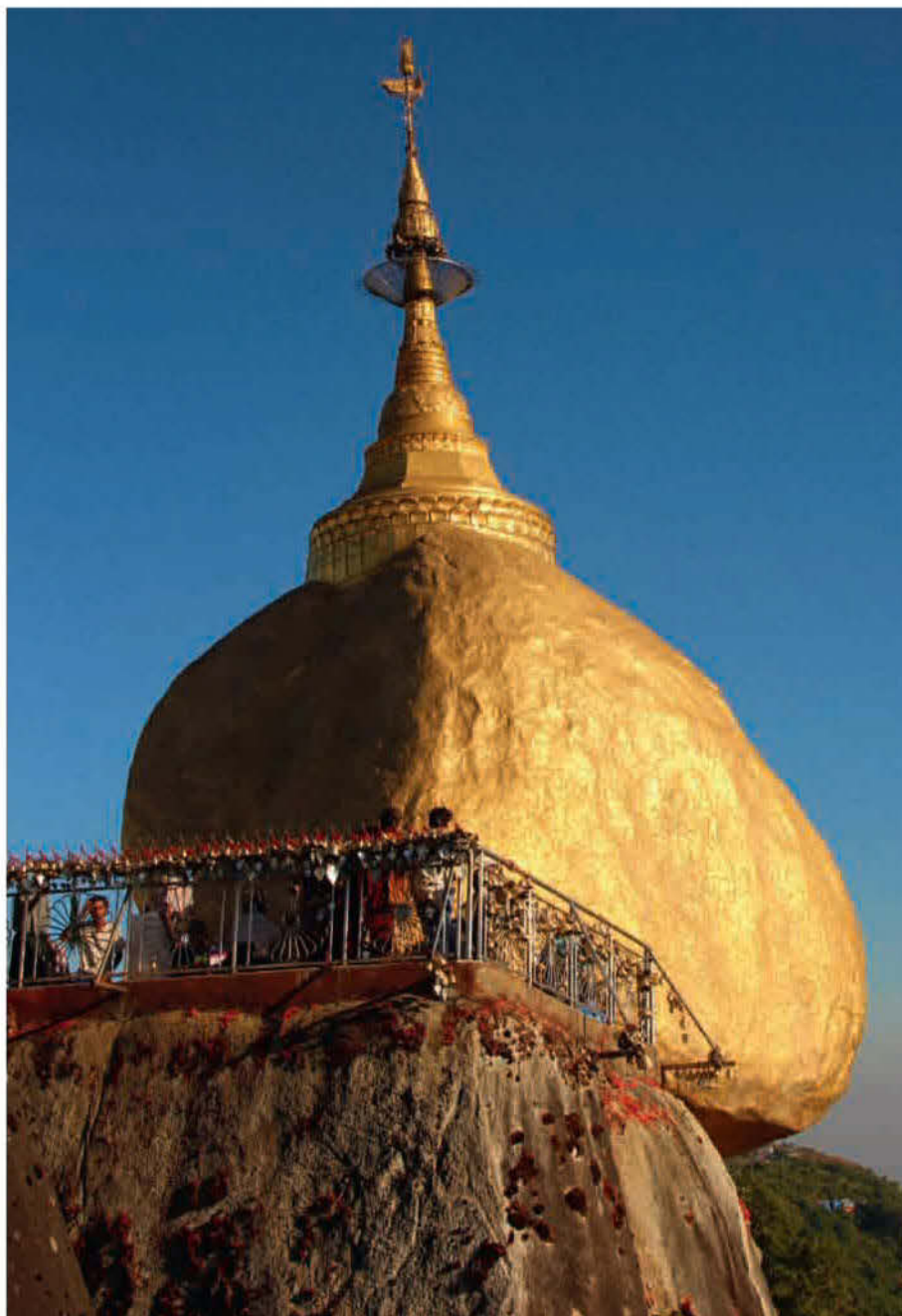
Try a new hike in New Europe – KE Adventure's *Bosnia: Mostar to Sarajevo* trip includes a range of spectacular routes through the Balkans' Dinaric Alps, a virtually untouched area where you'll see few other tourists. Meet locals living traditional lives in the remote villages of the Bjelasnica Mountains; scale Bosnia's highest summit, Mt Maglic; and visit Sutjeska National Park to ascend Ugljesin for panoramic views of the rocky Zelengora peaks.

WHO: KE Adventure Travel (017687 73966, keadventure.com)

WHEN: 21 Jun, 19 Jul, 9 Aug, 6 Sept, 20 Sept 2015

HOW LONG: 7 nights

HOW MUCH: From £895 (excl flights)



WILDLIFE
WONDERS

Unforgettable encounters – from the rare
and endangered to the raw and dangerous

USA

Go wild in winter

£50 OFF Chock-full of wildlife and wonderfully weird landscapes, Yellowstone NP is fabulous year round. However, for the most magical (and least crowded) view of the park, join Grand American Adventures' *Yellowstone Winter Wildlife* trip. Travelling via snow coach, snowshoes and cross-country skis, you can access offbeat areas of the park, and view its geysers, canyons and creatures. You'll also go wolf-tracking with an expert guide.

WHO: Grand American Adventures (0333 999 7961, grandamericanadventures.com)

WHEN: 11 Jan, 8 Mar 2015

HOW LONG: 6 days

HOW MUCH: From £1,649 (excl flights)

AUSTRALIA

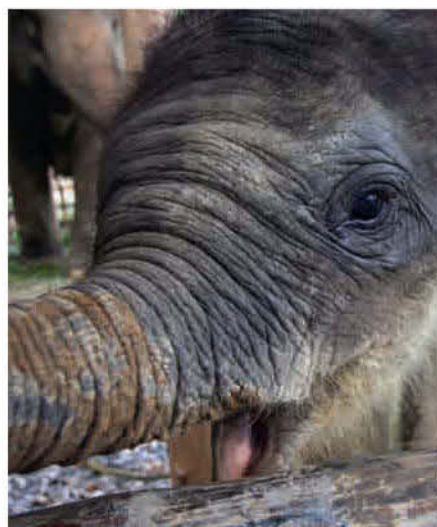
Discover a natural paradise
Queensland is home to rainforest, reef, the world's largest sand island and creatures aplenty. See a whole host of them on Wildlife Worldwide's *Nature Coast, Dingoes & Humpbacks* trip. You'll look for dingos, whales and some of the 40,000 migratory birds that visit Fraser Island; spy wallabies and possums in Kondalilla National Park and explore the rich marine biodiversity of Lady Elliot Island.

WHO: Wildlife Worldwide (01962 302086, wildlifeworldwide.com)

WHEN: Flexible departures, Aug-Oct 2015

HOW LONG: 10 days

HOW MUCH: £2,795 (incl flights)



THAILAND

Plan an elephant escape

Enjoy the jungle on Hayes & Jarvis's *Elephant Hills* trip. After exploring Bangkok, you'll travel to Khao Sok NP to stay at the luxury tents of Elephant Hills Jungle Safari Camp; here you can help feed and bathe the jumbos, investigate the forest, float down the river on a longtail boat, look out for gibbons in the treetops and wind down on the unspoiled beaches at Khao Lak.

WHO: Hayes & Jarvis (01293 735881, hayesandjarvis.co.uk)

WHEN: 11 May 2015 **HOW LONG:** 10 days

HOW MUCH: From £1,149 (excl flights)

NORWAY

Mush a husky-sled

Join Sven on Artisan Travel's *Karasjok: Husky Safari to Alta*, a dazzling dash through Finnmark. Not only is Sven the 11-times winner of Finnmarksløpet, the longest dog-sled race in Europe, he also built the lodge you'll be staying in at Karasjok. You'll speed through frozen landscapes (pictured above), look out for wild reindeer and bed down in wilderness cabins, before finishing in Alta, with a night in the Sorrisniva Igloo Hotel.

WHO: Artisan Travel (01670 785085, artisantravel.co.uk)

WHEN: Flexible, departures 1 Feb-30 Apr 2015

HOW LONG: 7 days

HOW MUCH: From £3,058 (incl flights) ►

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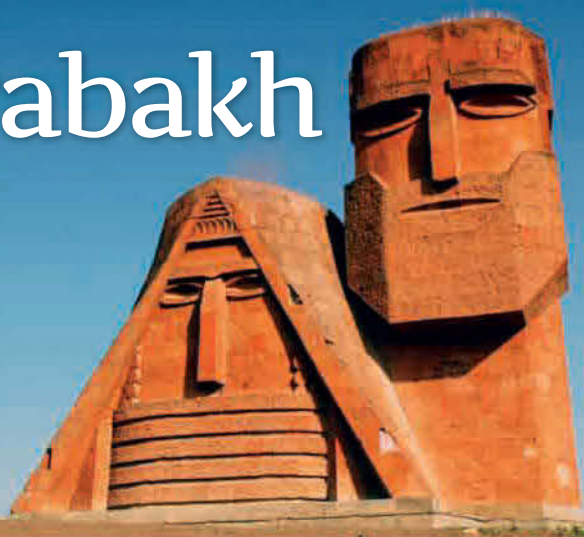
Pioneering Nagorno Karabakh

Join the specialists in alternative travel for an incredible tour of Nagorno Karabakh, the ethnic Armenian enclave inside Azerbaijan which declared independence in 1992. Despite decades of languishing as a breakaway Caucasus state of the former Soviet Union, the stunning natural beauty and cultural richness of this isolated mountain region are undeniable. Travel firmly off-the-beaten-track and discover ancient monasteries, pagan temples, traditional villages and unspoilt mountainscapes on this unique tour for pioneering travellers.

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◀ INDIA

Select a safari with a difference

£50 OFF Gujarat is home to the world's entire population of Asiatic lions – just one of the species you'll be keeping an eye out for on Audley's *Wildlife Treasures of Gujarat* trip. The western state sees few tourists but is packed with exotic creatures – including striped hyenas, blackbuck and wolves. Visit the Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary to look for flamingos and pelicans, safari to see Asiatic wild ass in Dasada and track those rare lions in Gir Forest. To take a break from your wildlife adventures, you can spend time on the beach at Portuguese-influenced Diu Island.

WHO: Audley Travel (01993 838330, audleytravel.com)

WHEN: Flexible

HOW LONG: 12 days

HOW MUCH: From £2,415 (incl flights)

KENYA & TANZANIA

Overland with the little'uns

£50 OFF Move over Butlins! Oasis Overland's *East Africa Family Adventure* is one of the few family-focused overlanding tours available in Africa, offering the whole brood a chance to share the classic experience of wildlife and epic scenery. Travelling by expedition truck from Nairobi to Arusha, you'll visit the Kenyan capital's giraffe sanctuary and elephant orphanage, head into the little-explored tea-growing highlands, camp next to hippo-filled watering holes, traverse the teeming plains of the Serengeti and enter the lush Ngorongoro Crater.

WHO: Oasis Overland (01963 363400, oasisoverland.co.uk)

WHEN: 3 Aug, 23 Dec 2015

HOW LONG: 9 days

HOW MUCH: From £795 + US\$445 local payment (excl flights)

PHILIPPINES

Go island-hopping

The Philippines is a new destination for Cox & Kings, and its *Island-hopping in the Philippines* trip is ideal for first-timers too. After exploring capital Manila, on Luzon, you'll fly to three of the vast archipelago's other islands: Cebu, to explore coral reefs and tiny atolls via motorised canoe; Bohol, for the UNESCO-listed Chocolate Hills geological formations and the chance to spot tarsiers (*pictured above*), dolphins and (March-June) sperm whales; and Boracay, home to beautiful white-sand beaches.

WHO: Cox & Kings (0207 873 5000, coxandkings.co.uk)

WHEN: Flexible

HOW LONG: 11 nights

HOW MUCH: From £3,195 (incl flights)



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PERU

Trek with creature comforts
Sleeping under canvas isn't for everyone. Fortunately, on Rainbow Tours' *Lares Adventure*, hikers keen to explore the Sacred Valley don't have to. On this route, you can swap tents and hostels for high-quality lodges, hot showers and tasty meals. After each day's amble in the postcard-perfect Andean valley, you can retire to a comfy bed. You'll get to visit Machu Picchu and other highlights of the Inca heartland too.

WHO: Rainbow Tours (020 7666 1260, rainbowtours.co.uk)

WHEN: Flexible

HOW LONG: 12 days

HOW MUCH: £3,025 (incl flights)



SOUTH AFRICA, ZIMBABWE & BOTSWANA

See Africa in style

Explore the great plains by plane, boat, bus and jeep on Aurora Expeditions' opulent *African Cruise Safari*. Whether you're searching for the Big Five, watching wandering wildebeest, ooo-ing over Victoria Falls or sipping sundowners amid the baobabs, you'll be doing it in style. Top it all off with a float aboard the *Zambezi Queen* (above), the most luxurious way to appreciate the wild Chobe River.

WHO: Aurora Expeditions (+61 2 9252 1033, auroraexpeditions.co.uk)

WHEN: 16 Apr 2015

HOW LONG: 14 nights

HOW MUCH: A\$7,990 [£4,350] (excl flights)



ARGENTINA, URUGUAY & BRAZIL

Take a path less travelled

£50
OFF

Explore off-the-beaten track South America on Journey Latin America's *Buenos Aires, Uruguay & South Brazil* trip. A local favourite rather than a gringo trail, the route runs from electrifying Buenos Aires across the River Plate into Uruguay (above) – where you can try your hand at riding and gaucho-ing on an estancia. Next, follow the coast up to Brazil to see the canyons and waterfalls of the Aparados da Serra NP, finishing with a ride on the historic Serra Verde train into the Atlantic forest.

WHO: Journey Latin America (020 3432 1592, journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

WHEN: 8 Oct 2015 **HOW LONG:** 16 nights

HOW MUCH: From £4,398 (incl flights)

GUATEMALA

Tackle the 'Maya Trail'

Fancy a Latin hike that isn't the Inca Trail? Then try Explore's *Maya Trek to Tikal*. Rather than arriving at the Mayan temples by coach, you'll trek through the wildlife-infested jungle for four days, wild camping, where you'll be woken by howler monkeys, discover hidden ruins and duck the crowds. The trip also includes a hike up Pacaya volcano for sunrise and navigating Lake Atitlán by boat to meet the indigenous peoples that live on its shores.

WHO: Explore (01252 884223, explore.co.uk)

WHEN: 18 Apr 2015

HOW LONG: 11 days

HOW MUCH: From £1,298 (excl flights) ▶



NICARAGUA

Swash your buckles

£50 OFF Feel part pioneer, part buccaneer on Steppes Travel's *Pirates of the Caribbean* trip. Trace the Rio San Juan – a once-infamous pirate passageway – as it cuts through the jungle, passing tombs and 17th-century forts en route. Then sail the Indio River, its forested banks rich in wildlife, to reach Indio Maiz Biological Reserve – 3,000 sq km of pristine rainforest harbouring big cats, manatees, macaws, toucans, monkeys and more. Finish with some R&R on the Corn Islands (pictured above), a stay on the shores of Lake Nicaragua and strolling colonial Granada.

WHO: Steppes Travel (0843 778 9926, steppestravel.com)

WHEN: 15 May 2015

HOW LONG: 16 nights

HOW MUCH: From £2,595 (excl flights)

BOLIVIA & CHILE

Explore the Andes

Duck the spray from erupting geysers, pass vibrantly coloured lakes, hike over snow-dusted volcanoes and cross salt flats that stretch as far as the eye can see. Using a private 4WD, HighLives' *Andes Majesty* trip visits the lesser-known national parks that straddle the Chile-Bolivia border – a combination of jaw-dropping landscapes, Aymara villages, alpaca herders, giant geoglyphs, Inca ruins, flamingo flocks and old adobe churches. And once you've exhausted both yourself and your camera's memory card, you can enjoy the Pacific coast beaches of Iquique.

WHO: HighLives Travel (0208 144 2629, highlives.co.uk)

WHEN: Tailormade

HOW LONG: 13 days

HOW MUCH: From £3,100 (excl flights)

USA

Make a musical roadtrip

Abercrombie & Kent's *The Great British Invasion* – a Deep South roadtrip accompanied by legendary rockers, Sons of Royalty – is the ultimate celebration of North American music heritage. Fire up your Harley (or car, if you prefer) in Nashville to start your journey through the Mississippi Delta. Visit the Jack Daniel Distillery, Tupelo (birthplace of Elvis), Memphis – home to Graceland, Beale Street and Sun Studio – and the Delta's Rock 'n' Roll Museum. Even better, this epic drive raises money for the NSPCC too.

WHO: Abercrombie & Kent (01242 858474, abercrombiekent.co.uk)

WHEN: 9 Apr 2015

HOW LONG: 10 days

HOW MUCH: From £2,980/4,200 car/Harley Davidson hire (incl flights)

CHILE & BOLIVIA

Reach for the stars

Chile's inky-skied Atacama Desert and Bolivia's remote and sparkly Salar de Uyuni salt flat are two of the planet's best places for gazing up at the great beyond. In the Atacama especially, high altitudes and extreme dryness keep the weather clear; it's no wonder that so many world-class observatories are located in the area. Rainbow Tours' *Ultimate Stargazing Adventure* makes the most of the astronomical opportunities you can find here, travelling the altiplano, skirting Lake Titicaca and visiting the Atacama's ALMA Observatory, which will be open for public tours in 2015.

WHO: Rainbow Tours (020 7666 1260, rainbowtours.co.uk)

WHEN: Flexible

HOW LONG: 14 nights

HOW MUCH: From £3,970 (incl flights)



TAIWAN

Hunt for treasures

£50 OFF Taiwan is a marvellous mishmash of Chinese, Japanese, Western and indigenous influences. Take in its best, and most off-the-beaten-track, bits on Wendy Wu Tours' *Taiwan Uncovered* trip. Eat well – and cheaply – in lively Taipei; find natural beauty at peak-fringed Sun Moon Lake and dramatic Taroko Gorge; feel a gold-rush thrill in the mountain-side mining town of Jinguashi, home to the Gold Ecological Park; experience the verdant landscape of volcanic Yangmingshan National Park; and lay back on the glorious beaches of Kenting National Park.
WHO: Wendy Wu Tours (0844 499 3899, wendywu tours.co.uk)
WHEN: 16 Mar, 28 Sept 2015
HOW LONG: 11 days
HOW MUCH: £2,990 (incl flights)

THAILAND & BURMA

Ride the rails

£50 OFF Selective Asia's *Railways Old & New* trip is not your average train journey, taking you along a variety of rails, including rarely used tracks. Starting from Bangkok, you'll journey to Kanchanaburi to learn about the Burma-Siam Railway; then, thanks to the new Hti Khi border crossing, you can continue west into Burma to see more of this infamous track. Other train rides include the Yangon circle (a lively commuter ride) and the overnight journey to Mandalay. The trip also includes a cruise on the Dutawaddy River, a cycle tour of Mandalay and a dramatic drive through the Gokteik Valley.
WHO: Selective Asia (01273 670001, selectiveasia.com)
WHEN: Flexible **HOW LONG:** 18 nights
HOW MUCH: From £2,521 (incl flights)

SVALBARD

Seek out snow fun

£50 OFF Don't fear winter: embrace it! Sunvil Discovery's *Svalbard: The Land of our Arctic Dreams* (above) trip heads Pole-wards to have fun in the snow. Based in Longyearbyen – the world's most northerly permanently populated town – you can zip across the frozen tundra on a snowmobile, explore by dog-sled or discover what it's like to live up here at the fascinating museum. Plus the 24-hour darkness provides the perfect canvas for the northern lights.
WHO: Sunvil Discovery (020 8568 4499, sunvil.co.uk)
WHEN: Flexible, departures to 17 May 2015
HOW LONG: 5 nights
HOW MUCH: From £1,342 (incl flights)

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VIETNAM

Pedal with the kids

Gather the whole clan and set off on an active two-wheeled *Velo Vietnam* adventure with Families Worldwide. Do as the locals do – explore the spectacular countryside by bicycle – as well as taking an overnight train ride, staying in a village longhouse and cruising around the karst outcrops of Halong Bay.

WHO: Families Worldwide (01962 737560, familiesworldwide.co.uk)

WHEN: 31 Mar, 7 Jul, 11 Aug, 20 Oct, 22 Dec 2015 (all school holidays dates)

HOW LONG: 12 days

HOW MUCH: From £1,399/1,579 child/adult (incl flights)

TURKEY

Trek new trails

The Lycian Way is so last decade! This year Turkish trekking is all about the Carian Trail, an 800km coastal walk inaugurated two years ago but somehow still virtually untrodden by visitors' feet. On Peter Sommer Travels' *Walking and Cruising the Carian Coast* trip you'll spend days walking sections of the herb-lined trail, via Byzantine churches, archaeological sites, ghost villages and ancient tombs; each evening you'll retire to a traditional gulet (*pictured below*), which gently floats along the shore and enables passengers to get access to the secluded coves and inlets that most other tours won't be able to reach.

WHO: Peter Sommer Travels (01600 888220, petersommer.com)

WHEN: 3 Oct 2015

HOW LONG: 7 nights

HOW MUCH: £2,175 (excl flights)

ITALY

Bike between peaks and lakes

£50 OFF This almost feels like two for the price of one: Headwater's self-guided *Italian Alps to Lake Garda Cycling* trip starts in rural alpine mountains, where Italian, Swiss and Austrian cultures collide, then winds down to the sunny shores of Lake Garda. The gentle route is doable by cyclists of all abilities, and will see you pedalling past flowery meadows, picturesque vineyards, the medieval market town of Glorenza, Trauttmansdorff Castle and ancient Mezzocorona towards the pine-fringed beaches of Riva.

WHO: Headwater (01606 828566, headwater.com)

WHEN: Saturdays, 2 May-10 Oct 2015

HOW LONG: 8 nights

HOW MUCH: From £1,099 (excl flights)

UGANDA & RWANDA

Walk on the wild side

£50 OFF Ramblers Worldwide Holidays' *Land of a Thousand Hills* trip combines the wild highlights of Rwanda and Uganda in one exciting journey. Trek through lush Ugandan jungles, with the chance to track mountain gorillas; meet the orphaned chimpanzees living on Ngamba Island; cast your eyes upwards to spot rare tree-climbing lions in Bwindi; explore scenic Queen Elizabeth National Park; take a canopy walk in Nyungwe NP; and look for golden monkeys in Ruhengeri NP.

WHO: Ramblers Worldwide Holidays (01707 331133, ramblersholidays.co.uk)

WHEN: 11 Sept, 4 Dec 2015

HOW LONG: 16 days

HOW MUCH: From £3,700 (incl flights)

LAPLAND

Go aurora hunting

Off the Map Travel's *Grand Aurora: Northern Lights* trip is one for the serious aurora hunter. You'll head out into the frozen wilderness of Lapland, covering not one but three of the best countries in which to see the northern lights: Norway, Sweden and Finland. Scour the skies for a glimpse of the greatest light show on earth, with the help of a local guide; explore Abisko National Park by husky sled; learn how to snap the aurora with an expert photographer; visit Tromsø's Polar Museum; have a go at ice-fishing; and meet the reindeer herders of Kilpisjärvi.

WHO: Off the Map Travel (0800 566 8901, offthemaptravel.co.uk)

WHEN: 20 Mar 2015

HOW LONG: 10 days

HOW MUCH: £5,999 (excl flights) ▶



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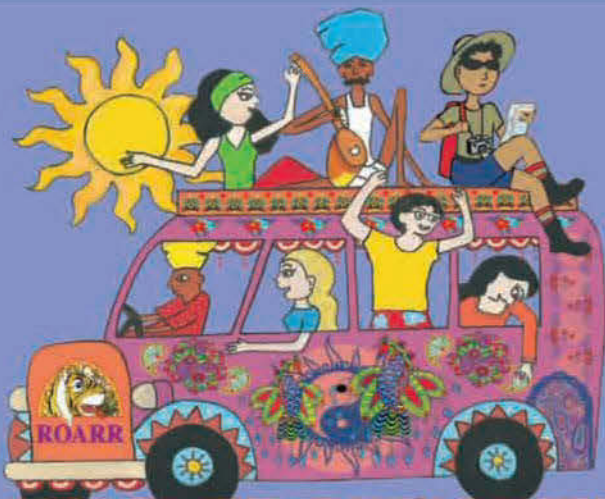
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◀ CHILE, ARGENTINA & BRAZIL

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£50 OFF Feel the pulse of Latin America via its world-class dance, food and wine on Tucan Travel's *South America Flyer* trip. Have a go at samba (or watch the professionals) in Rio, slurp mouthwatering reds in Mendoza's vineyards and work off a succulent steak with a tango night in Buenos Aires. Fast-paced, full-bellied, lots of fun.

WHO: Tucan Travel (0800 804 8435, tucantravel.com)

WHEN: 21 May, 13 Aug, 5 Nov 2015

HOW LONG: 11 days

HOW MUCH: From £1,469 (excl flights)

MONTENEGRO & ALBANIA

Boot-up in the Balkans

Mountain Kingdoms' *The Accursed Mountains Trek* (pictured below) sounds a terrifying prospect – but actually this new hike from Montenegro into Albania is graded moderate, and offers little but pleasures. Tramping ancient paths between the two Balkan nations, pack-horses carrying your kit, you'll pass marvellous mountain landscapes, traverse the 'Shangri La' valley of Thethi, climb Komovi peak, take a boat to access remote communities, visit Skadar Castle, stay at traditional guesthouses and relax on the beautiful Bay of Kotor.

WHO: Mountain Kingdoms (01453 844400, mountainkingdoms.com)

WHEN: 27 Jun, 8 Aug, 12 Sept 2015

HOW LONG: 9 days

HOW MUCH: From £895 (excl flights)



MALAYSIA

Borneo by bike

Orang utans, turtle hatchlings, rhinoceros hornbills – wildlife abounds in Borneo. And you can better immerse yourself in the island's natural habitats by exploring on two wheels. On SpiceRoads' *Wilds of Sarawak by Bicycle* trip you'll cover 250km, pedalling amid jungles, through nature reserves and to intricate mangrove systems. Other highlights include a visit to Semenggoh Nature Reserve, to meet the orphaned orang utans, and swapping bikes for kayaks to navigate the Sarawak River.

WHO: SpiceRoads (+66 2 381 7490, spiceroads.com)

WHEN: 22 Feb, 5 Jul, 9 Aug, 13 Sept, 18 Oct, 13 Dec 2015

HOW LONG: 7 nights

HOW MUCH: US\$1,645 [£1,045] (excl flights)

NAMIBIA

Explore remote regions by bike and boat

£50 OFF Namibia is one of the last great wildernesses, and on ATI Holidays' *Desert Knights Mountain Bike* tour you'll get the chance to explore it. Cycle over ancient sand dunes by moonlight, explore the mountainous desert scenery of the Ai/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park on

PORTUGAL

Hike to hidden coasts and castles

So much more than the Algarve, Portugal is also home to lesser-known seashores and excellent walking. Macs Adventure's self-guided *Sintra Coastal & Heritage Trails* trip (pictured above) proves that point, exploring the extraordinary inland and coastal routes through Sintra-Cascais Natural Park.

Walk past castles, palaces and monasteries; soak up the breathtaking views of Cape Roca – Europe's most westerly point; take a dip on tranquil beaches; and enjoy the freshest seafood and the most charming hotels.

WHO: Macs Adventure (0141 530 1950, macsadventure.com)

WHEN: Flexible

HOW LONG: 7 nights

HOW MUCH: From £725 (excl flights)

two wheels and navigate the mighty Orange River in a canoe.

WHO: ATI Holidays (0808 234 9378, infotour-africa.com)

WHEN: 20 Sept 2015

HOW LONG: 14 days

HOW MUCH: From £2,450 (excl flights) ▶



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TURKEY

Get Istanbul insight

Cazenove+loyd's *Culture and Literature in Istanbul* trip is no ordinary city break. The emphasis is on the luxurious, the expert and the extraordinary. Led by British author, Turkophile and regular *Wanderlust* contributor, Jeremy Seal, you'll gain real insight into different aspects of Istanbul life (pictured right). Enjoy exclusive after-hours museum visits; take tea at the Pierre Loti Café and learn about the French writer and naval officer it's named after; enlist a personal shopper before hitting the bazaars; and board a private yacht to lunch at the island home of war correspondent and historian Owen Matthews.

WHO: Cazenove+loyd (0207 384 2332, cazloyd.com)

WHEN: 8 Sept 2015

HOW LONG: 5 days

HOW MUCH: From £3,100 (excl flights)

KENYA

Make a difference in the Mara

£50 OFF Join Craig Burkinshaw, the founder of Audley Travel, on a unique cultural journey through Kenya. Explore the Masai Mara (pictured above), sharing experiences with rural Kipsigi villagers, helping the women fetch water and giving a lesson in the local school. You'll stay at a camp run by Free The Children, and gain a real insight into the people and needs of this fascinating community.

WHO: Audley Travel (01993 838510, audleytravel.com)

WHEN: 15 Nov 2015

HOW LONG: 9 nights

HOW MUCH: From £4,820 (incl flights)



PERU

Travel with a BBC cameraman

We know the importance of having a great guide so had to include this – Crees Tours' *Inspiring Manu: Behind the Lens with Charlie Hamilton-James* is a unique opportunity to travel Peru with the BBC wildlife cameraman and photojournalist, and meet the people who inspired BBC2's *I Bought A Rainforest* programme; all profits from the trip support their development of more sustainable living practices. You'll tour Lima, Cusco and the Peruvian cloudforest; visit Machu Picchu and the Sacred Valley; and spend time in wildlife-abundant Manu Biosphere Reserve.

WHO: Crees Tours (020 7581 2932, crees-manu.org)

WHEN: 29 May 2015

HOW LONG: 15 days

HOW MUCH: From £4,259 (incl flights)

INDIA

Trek majestic mountains

£50 OFF Are you a Himalaya hiking novice? Then World Expeditions' *Nanda Devi Alpine Trek with Garry Weare* is designed with you in mind. The guidebook author has created the perfect intro trek (graded moderate), combining trails through alpine meadows, bamboo forests, shepherd camps and traditional Hindu villages with high passes and magisterial mountain views – of Nanda Devi (7,816m), the highest peak in India, and the other 7,000-ers that surround it. Breathtaking indeed.

WHO: World Expeditions (0800 074 4135, worldexpeditions.co.uk)

WHEN: 9 May 2015

HOW LONG: 19 days

HOW MUCH: £1,990 (excl flights)

GREECE

Eat around an island

You don't have to travel to the other side of the globe for a foodie trip bursting with new flavours – MasterChef Travel's *Hidden Gems of Crete* trip involves a flight of just a few hours but offers a world of gastronomic delights. Attend tastings with local olive oil producers, beekeepers, bakers and winemakers before uncovering the secrets of Cretan food with a specialist guide and refining your culinary skills at a MasterChef cooking workshop. There are trips to ancient cultural treasures too.

WHO: MasterChef Travel (020 7873 5005, mastercheftravel.co.uk)

WHEN: 22 Apr, 13 May, 9 Sept, 7 Oct 2015

HOW LONG: 8 days

HOW MUCH: From £1,395 (incl flights) ►

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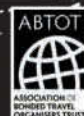
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WHO: G Adventures (0344 272 2060, gadventures.co.uk)

WHEN: 21 Jun, 4 & 19 Jul, 1 & 23 Aug, 5 & 20 Sept, 3 Oct 2015 **HOW LONG:** 14 days

HOW MUCH: From £1,399 (excl flights)

LAOS & CAMBODIA

Mix icons and unknowns

£50 OFF Undiscovered Destinations' *A Journey to Forever Mountain* trip links Laos' bustling capital of Vientiane with the must-see temples of Angkor via an array of fascinating sites. Ponder the bizarre Plain of Jars, tour Luang Prabang's temples and help teach English in a local school. The highlight is exploring little-known Phoi Louey National Protected Area, interesting wildlife (look for otters and porcupines) and villagers practising animist traditions.

WHO: Undiscovered Destinations (0191 296 2674, undiscovered-destinations.com)

WHEN: 22 Aug, 14 Nov 2015

HOW LONG: 16 days

HOW MUCH: From £1,699 (excl flights)

BURMA

Meet the water tribe

For more than four millennia, the Moken have inhabited the Myeik Archipelago of southern Burma. These so-called 'sea gypsies' have spent their whole lives at sea – until 2004 that is, when the Burmese government encouraged many to move onto land. However, they still maintain their way of life, their daily routines revolving around fishing, diving and foraging. Wild Frontiers' *The Sea Gypsies of Burma* trip is an intriguing introduction to their watery world.

WHO: Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968, wildfrontierstravel.com)

WHEN: 25 Oct 2015 **HOW LONG:** 10 days

HOW MUCH: £3,295 (excl flights)



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Unlock ancient secrets

£50 OFF Delve into Iran's tumultuous past on Travel the Unknown's *Glories of Persia* (Archaeology Tour). Hear the stories of good, evil, heroes and villains that are woven into the historic sites, and which help to build a picture of the nation as we know it now. Travel from Tehran to the ancient Persian capital of Persepolis, to mud-brick Yazd, to the rock-carvings at Tagh e Bostan, to poetic Shiraz, and to venerable Hamadan and Susa, two of the oldest cities in the world.

WHO: Travel the Unknown (020 7183 6371, traveltheunknown.com)

WHEN: 10 Apr, 12 Sept 2015

HOW LONG: 13 nights

HOW MUCH: From £3,295 (incl flights)

CUBA

Stay with the locals

Experience the real Cuba on Rickshaw Travel's *Mi Casa, Tu Casa* trip. By day, spot classic cars in Havana, ramble the rolling tobacco hills of Viñales, hike through the emerald coffee fields of Las Terrazas and soak up the lively atmosphere of UNESCO-listed Trinidad. By night, bed down in *casas particulares*, small B&Bs run by Cuban families where you can learn all about local life. Then, toast your trip with a rainbow-infused cocktail on a lazy Varadero beach.

WHO: Rickshaw Travel (01273 322059, rickshawtravel.co.uk)

WHEN: Flexible **HOW LONG:** 13 nights

HOW MUCH: £1,015 (excl flights)

BRAZIL

Mix cities, sea and jungle

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WHO: Llama Travel (020 7263 3000, llamatravel.com)

WHEN: 3 Aug, 7 Sept, 12 Oct, 2 & 30 Nov 2015

HOW LONG: 13 days

HOW MUCH: From £1,999 (incl flights)

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WHO: Journey Latin America (020 3432 6037, journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

WHEN: 4 May 2015 **HOW LONG:** 17 days

HOW MUCH: £2,848 (incl flights) ►

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£50 OFF Rajasthan is famed for many things, from magnificent palaces to wildlife-filled sanctuaries. Lesser known – but no less rich – is the state's musical heritage, which Songlines Music Travel's *Rajasthan Musical Expedition* will reveal. Travel from Delhi, meeting local artists – from Langa musicians to sarengi players – and enjoying varied performances. The trip ends out in the desert, for the Rajasthan International Folk Festival, with world-class acts filling Jodhpur's Mehrangarh Fort.

WHO: Songlines Music Travel
(01992 579697, songlinesmusictravel.com)

WHEN: 17 Oct 2015

HOW LONG: 11 nights

HOW MUCH: From £2,545 (incl flights)

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There's perhaps no more authentic way to explore Mongolia than on horseback – so join Goyo Travel's Hooves of Hovsgol & Horse Festival trip (*pictured below*). Ride around the east side of crystal-clear Lake Hovsgol – Mongolia's 'blue pearl' – spending nights in eco-camps on the water's edge, meeting nomadic families and relaxing in thermal springs. Finish your equine adventure at the intimate Burentogtoh Horse Festival.

WHO: Goyo Travel (01869 866520, goyotrail.com)

WHEN: 20 Jul 2015

HOW LONG: 14 nights

HOW MUCH: From £2,145 (excl flights)



JAPAN

See the snow festival

£50 OFF On The Go Tours' Sapporo Snow Festival trip showcases Japan at its wintry best. From frenetic Tokyo, fly up to northern Hokkaido, where the season is most magical. Glimpse the balletic courtship dance of red-crowned cranes, cleanse yourself in steamy onsen (hot spring baths), cruise the Shiretoko Peninsula in a sturdy icebreaker and try an exciting range of snow sports in the glistening countryside. Top it all off by wandering amid the mammoth ice sculptures of the Sapporo Snow Festival (*above*), which transform the city's Odori Park into something out of a fairytale.

WHO: On The Go Tours (020 7371 1113, onthegotours.com)

WHEN: 4 Feb 2015

HOW LONG: 14 nights

HOW MUCH: £3,799 (excl flights)



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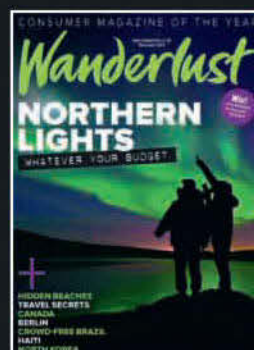
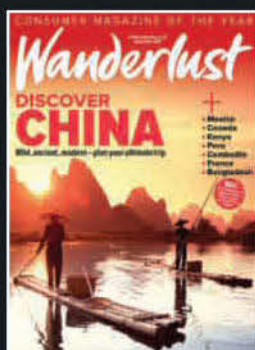
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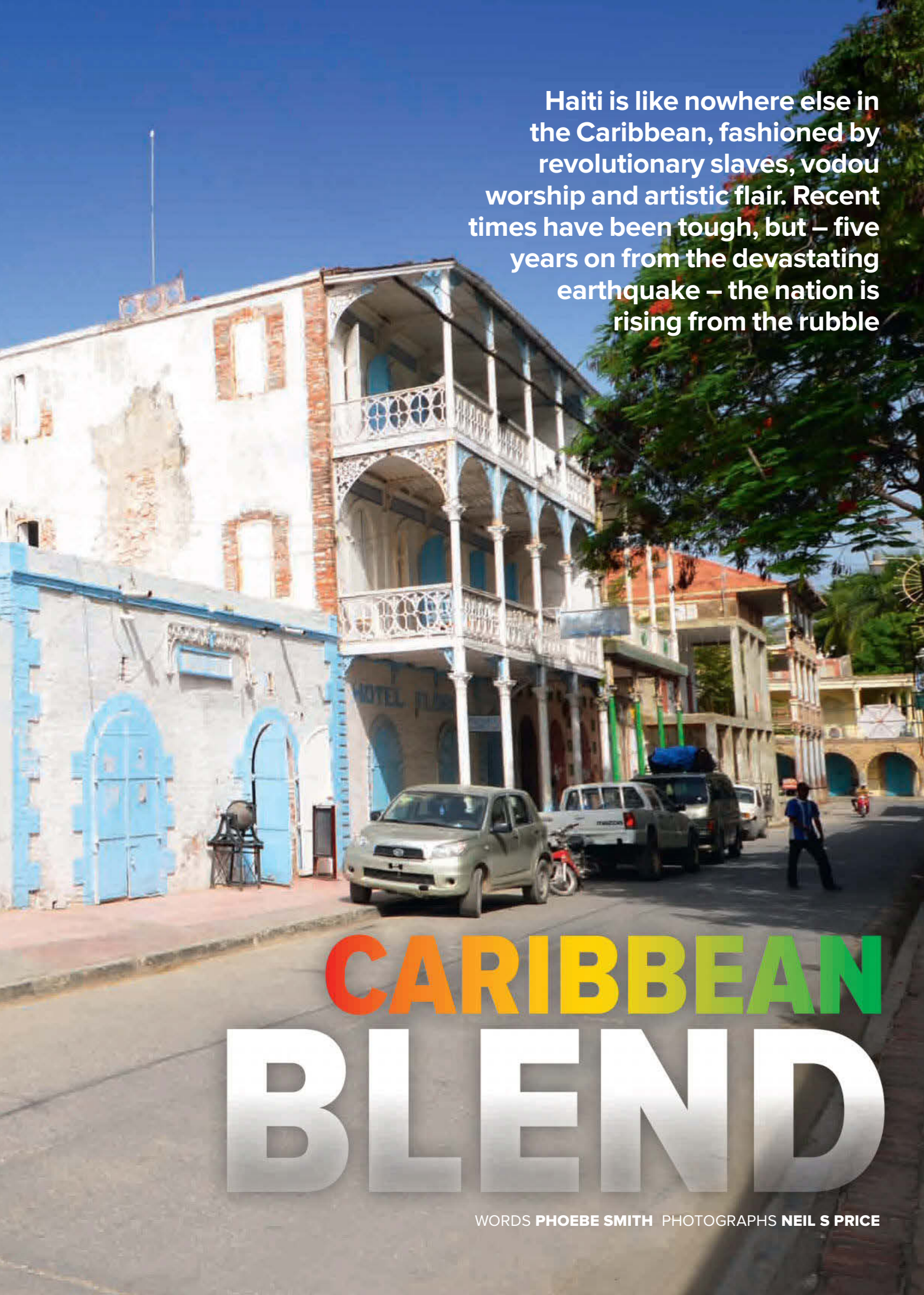
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Haiti is like nowhere else in the Caribbean, fashioned by revolutionary slaves, vodou worship and artistic flair. Recent times have been tough, but – five years on from the devastating earthquake – the nation is rising from the rubble

CARIBBEAN BLEND

WORDS PHOEBE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHS NEIL S PRICE



Beat goes on...
Drummers play near
Cap-Haïtien now as
they would have over
200 years ago when
Haiti became the first
black republic

The drums were getting louder, a low, pounding rhythm that even seemed to be vibrating the trees. Candles placed in the hollows of the branches flickered, lighting the way in a sepia glow. I followed the shadow of my guide Emmanuel Brignol as we headed deeper into the forest on the trail of a vodou ceremony.

Suddenly there was an explosion of sounds. In front of

me a priestess – her body wrapped in a red and yellow dress, her hair cloaked in a vermillion cloth, her arms clasped by bangles – yelled and chanted, her feet kicking up dust as she beat them down on the ground. The drummers banged the skins ferociously. Then one of the dancers took out a can of air freshener.

“What’s that for?” I asked Emmanuel as the priestess raised it and sprayed it skyward, emptying its contents, singing and pulsating violently as she did so.

“It’s to call the spirits,” he explained as I fought to hold back a cough caused by the floral-scented cloud. “In the past they might have used potions, blended for a particular purpose, but now it’s easier to use that.”

A modern convenience employed to serve a different purpose: it’s a concept that defines vodou (not the Hollywood-ised voodoo) here in Haiti. The religion was brought over to the Caribbean by slaves from Africa in the late 17th century. They were immediately forbidden from practising it and forced to convert to Catholicism.

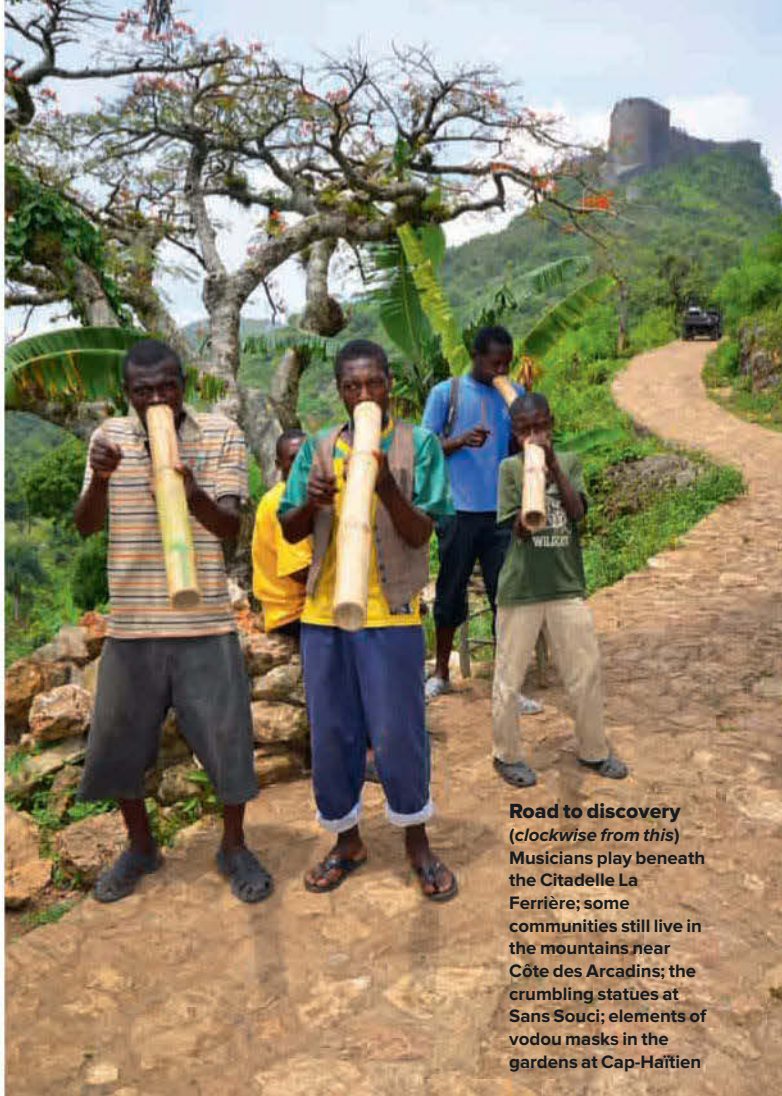
But the slaves didn’t give up; instead they hid their spirits in Catholic deities. When their masters saw them praying to the Virgin Mary they were actually praying to Ezili Freda, a vodou *lwa* (spirit) of love and luxury; making an offering to St Patrick, they were really honouring Damballah, the bringer of health and happiness. And now here, in the town of Trou-du-Nord on Haiti’s north coast, I had joined thousands of worshippers who had turned out to celebrate St John the Baptist, aka the powerful Ti Jean Dantor – a *lwa* who, according to Emmanuel, looks after the dead and likes a good drink.

I stood riveted, grasping a half-fallen wooden fence. It would be all too easy to get lost in the moment, to forget myself completely; it was all I could do to stop my feet from pounding the floor in unison with the crowd.

Odd one out

It was a scene few envisage when picturing the Caribbean – a far cry from the white-sand beaches and cocktails of the brochures. But then Haiti is not really like the rest of the Caribbean. Situated on the west of Hispaniola, the island it shares with the Dominican Republic, Haiti has long been considered by most as the less desirable side of the divide. Plagued by political demonstrations, military coups and a series of kidnappings, and then shaken by a powerful earthquake in 2010 – which killed over 250,000 people – it became something of a no-go save for NGO workers and their security staff.

Five years on from the quake, however, and things are changing. Though my flight over from Miami was full of US missionaries and Haitians returning home rather than tourists, and though the airport security guard asked me why on earth I would come here ►



Road to discovery
(clockwise from this)
Musicians play beneath
the Citadelle La
Ferrière; some
communities still live in
the mountains near
Côte des Arcadins; the
crumbling statues at
Sans Souci; elements of
vodou masks in the
gardens at Cap-Haïtien



‘Vegetation lined the way, rising high either side like green turrets, but soon I spotted the towering walls of the Citadelle on top of the mountain, mirage-like against the hazy sky’

◀ for a holiday, both the government and the locals are preparing themselves for tourism. Chain hotels are springing up; flights from Latin America are launching, making Haiti a viable add-on to a South or Central American adventure; the diaspora in the USA are beginning to take vacations in the coastal resorts of Côte des Arcadins; and whispers abound of more cruise-ship visits – currently only one boat docks here, and that’s on a local-free private beach. It seems that, from the (now mostly cleared) rubble, a new Haiti is emerging.

Revolutionary road

This isn’t the first time that a period of tumult has preceded something astounding in Haiti, as I found out in the northern city of Cap-Haïtien. It was here in 1791 that a vodou ceremony – much like the one I experienced in Trou-du-Nord – kick-started the only successful slave revolt in history. “Vodou gave them a cause,” explained former minister of tourism and Cap-Haïtien local Eddy Lubin. “A slave is a biological machine, but vodou gave them something to hold onto – an emotional attachment.”

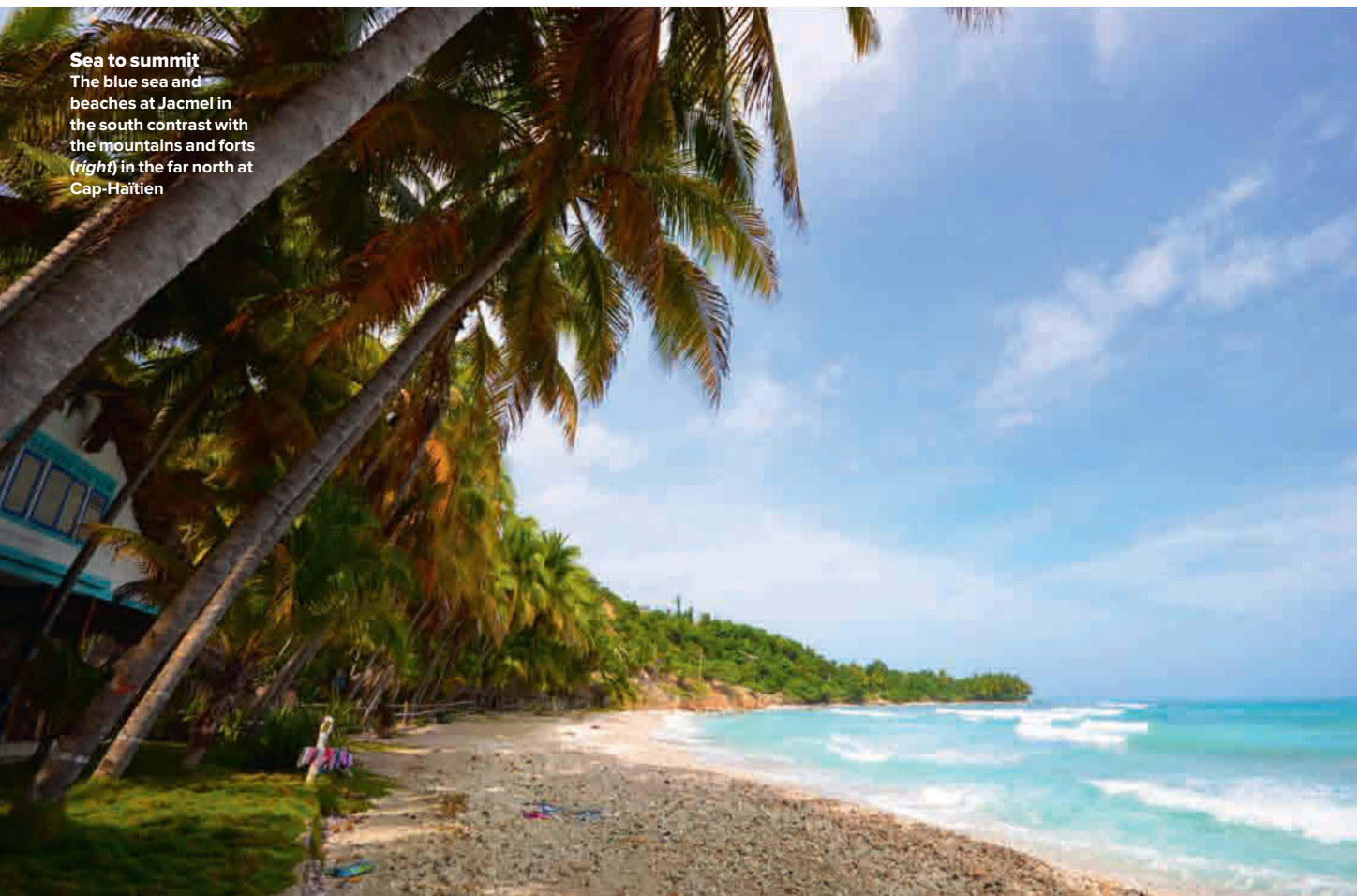
Fuelled by passion, and helped by their spiritual beliefs, the slaves were successful. By 1804 the colonial French had been wiped out and Haiti became a black-led republic: the first in the world. “Fearful of revenge, the Haitian leader of the north, Henri

Christophe, ordered the building of the imposing Citadelle La Ferrière, a fort to protect them from invasion,” explained Eddy.

Arriving at Choiseul, from where a walk or mule ride leads up to the citadelle, I was overrun almost immediately by street vendors offering me everything from hand-carved flutes to strings of brightly coloured beads. Resisting a sale, I was assigned a mule and handler and began ascending the winding slope, the clip-clop of my transport’s hooves reassuring on the cobbled path. At first vegetation lined the way, rising high on both sides like green turrets, but soon I spotted the towering walls on top of the mountain, mirage-like against the hazy sky. Cloud broke to reveal ramparts and cannons, intimidating weaponry peeking from every opening. With the fortress standing at over 900m above sea level, you have to wonder how willingly the newly freed slaves carried the huge stones and other building materials up here.

The feared French retaliation never came, and Christophe settled in Sans Souci palace, which he had built beneath the Citadelle’s walls. His reign ended in 1820 (he committed suicide after a coup); in 1842 an earthquake destroyed most of Sans Souci. Drums beat in the distance as I climbed its imposing staircase and viewed its statues and stone regalia. Today it sits, like the Citadelle, as a haunting relic of a powerful moment in the past. ►

Sea to summit
The blue sea and beaches at Jacmel in the south contrast with the mountains and forts (right) in the far north at Cap-Haïtien





Falling for Haiti

The waterfall at Bassin Bleu; (opposite page clockwise from top) the Haitian flag in Jacmel made by local children in mosaic; a 'gingerbread house' in Port-au-Prince; Haiti's national flower, the hibiscus grows in abundance; Jacmel artist Ronald Mevs in his studios



◀ Something in the water

From stone forts to sandcastles: next I headed to the far south of Haiti to a small town called Jacmel. When the north of Haiti was ruled by Christophe, the south was the domain of less-tyrannical Alexandre Pétion, and a more laid-back vibe still lingers here. Packed full of artists, musicians and beachside properties, Jacmel is less built up and distinctly more Caribbean in feel.

Before exploring the town proper I stopped at the small village of Grand Fond, from where my guides led me to a natural feature called Bassin Bleu. Sweat dripped off my forehead as I made my way through the canopy, the humidity rising with the thickness of the greenery. At the first of the three waterfalls that tumble into the gorge here, local women sat washing clothes and conversing loudly in Creole, its French intonations sounding almost song-like. I tiptoed across stepping-stones and soon reached the second

cascade, where a cerulean lake was churned by a metre-high tumble of water. By now I was fighting the urge to leap in – and I wouldn't have to wait long. After another scramble down some rocks, the only way to reach the third drop was by swimming. I needed little persuasion, but yelped at the coolness as I plunged in up to my neck. However, if that took my breath away, it was as nothing compared to seeing the final cascade. The pool was edged by vertical cliffs and craggy boulders, and I watched as my guides climbed up the sides and backflipped flamboyantly, their splashes echoing off the gorge walls.

Refreshed, I arrived in town, where I was greeted by a woman who called herself Madame Jacmel. She was a stylish older lady; with her hair neatly scraped back, ringlets framing her face, earrings dangling and a pale-blue scarf tied to one side, she looked like she might break into a salsa at any minute. Her English was limited, so we tried to ►

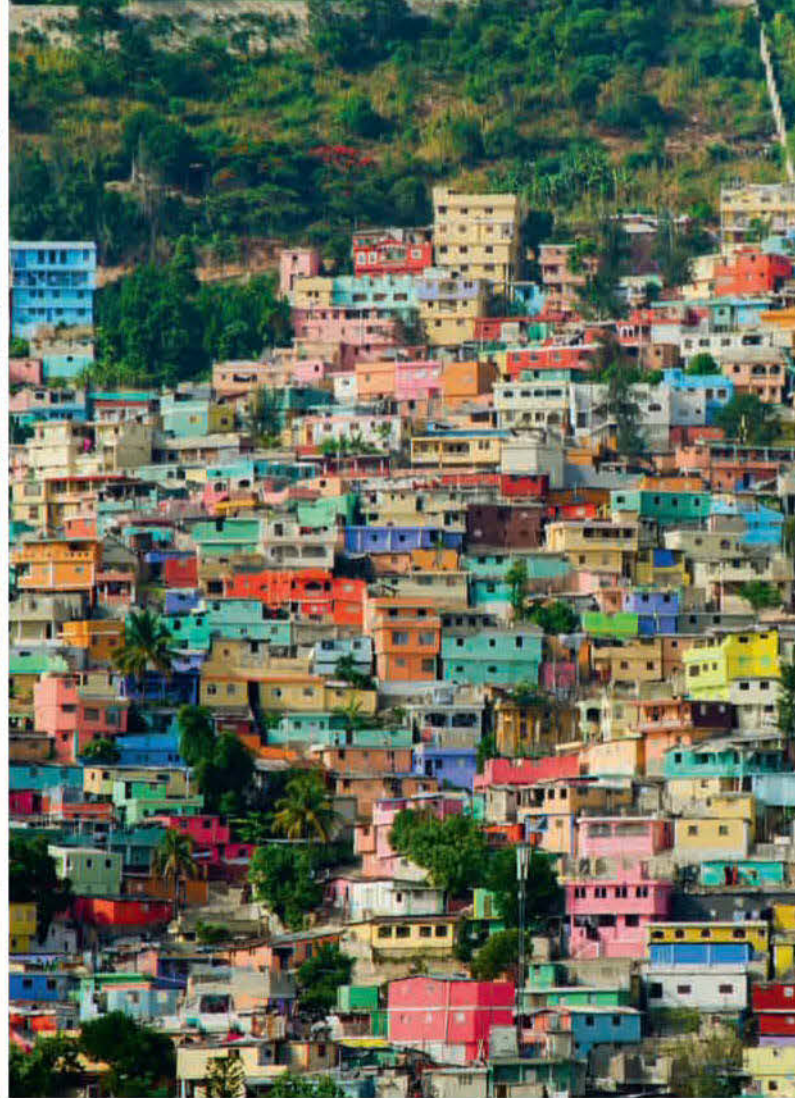
'I tiptoed across the stepping-stones and soon we reached the second fall, where a cerulean lake was churned by a tumble of metre-high water'

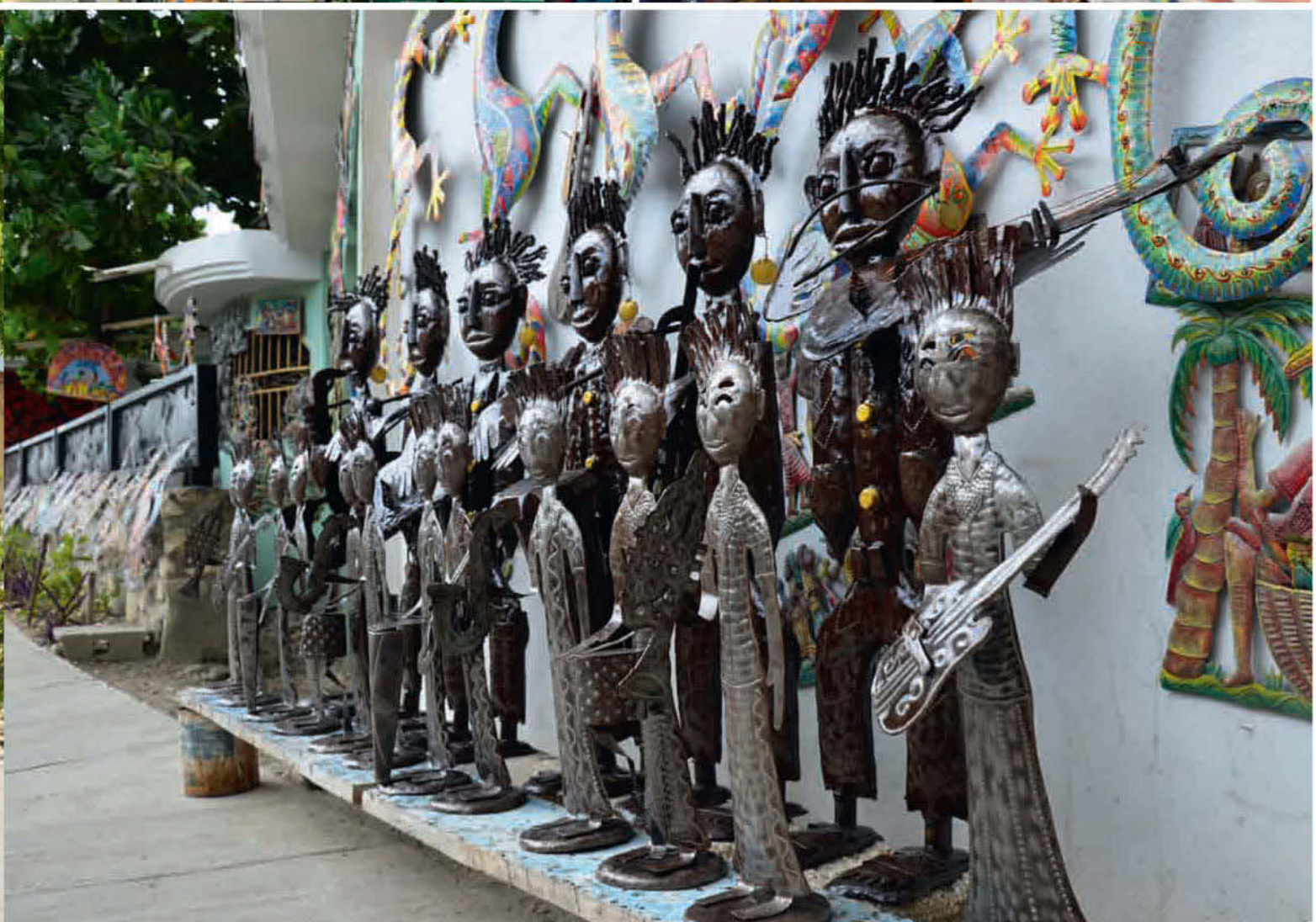


Haiti

Caribbean colour

(clockwise from this) Street vendors in Port-au-Prince; the colourful shantytown of Jalousie in the capital city; bartering in the Iron Market in downtown; classic Haitian art in Croix-des-Bouquets; brightly painted tap taps are the main transportation in Haiti





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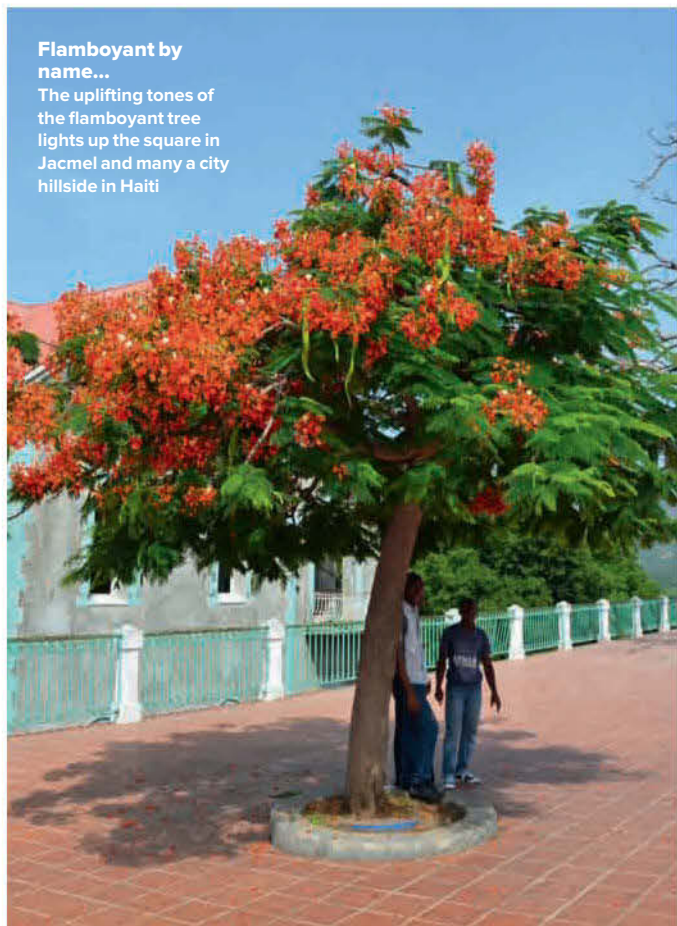
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Flamboyant by name...

The uplifting tones of the flamboyant tree lights up the square in Jacmel and many a city hillside in Haiti



◀ converse in broken French. She showed me some papier-mâché heads from last year's carnival – a Haitian take on Mardi Gras, with vodou influences – and faces painted on the shells of calabash fruits.

As I meandered around the streets, I found similarly brightly coloured items everywhere. Vendors arranged their wares on the pavement: flower-coated cockerels, lion faces, globes, models of *tap taps* (Haiti's vibrant buses), all made from wood, metal and coconut husks. Near the promenade two teenage boys were busy adding layers of glue to their papier-mâché structures. And across the road from the charming Hotel Florita, I found the donation-funded FOSAJ Gallery, which has an art school that teaches the next generation traditional Haitian styles – either full of colour, or a mix of dolls, bent cutlery and sequins, nodding to vodou motifs. In this town art is not just a job but a passion.

"Maybe it's something in the water," laughed Ronald Mevs when I asked what made Jacmel such a mecca for handicrafts. An artist with a studio just outside the town, Ronald thought for a moment before adding: "Perhaps because the environment is pleasant – there's lots of green space and the light is good." I looked at one of his paintings, a fusion of reds and blacks, with bird-like shapes emerging through the chaos as though a palimpsest. Downstairs his workshop looked like a salvage yard, filled with scrap wood, metal and plastic. One of his paintings had been created on what looked like an old sheet. "Sometimes I don't have canvas," he explained, "so I paint on whatever I can find."

New hope

Back in Port-au-Prince, such creativity and resourcefulness were just as prevalent. I journeyed to the suburb of Croix-des-Bouquets in the north-west, near the fields of sugar cane that still supply the local Barbancourt Rhum distillery. The unmistakable chink-chink

'Looking out of the bus window I smiled when I noticed the occasional red flamboyant tree breaking through the stacks of concrete'

of hammers hitting metal resonated as I began to explore the network of more than 20 workshops here. Sculptors use scrap steel drums to fashion elaborately intricate wall ornaments called *fer découpé*. Using a chisel they cut out the shapes of vodou lwa, hearts, trees, birds and suns; one artist called Eugene Jaques, aka Mr Rasta, also sources old cooking utensils and bends wire rods to create large freestanding installations.

In downtown Port-au-Prince, amid the beeping horns of always gridlocked traffic, the theme continued. On the Grand Rue artists create sculptures using anything and everything they can find – from old TVs to car bumpers and broken keyboards. As I passed this thronging scene, women walked by selling peanut brittle, balancing huge and varied loads on their heads.

I was driving through the capital to reach the eastern mountains in Kenscoff, where I was meeting environmentalist Jane Wynne at the Wynne Farm Ecological Reserve. Thanks to USAID funding, the reserve has established programmes to try to encourage locals to employ more sustainable ways of farming. "My father established this in 1956," Jane explained. "We just want to make people realise that they can work the land and still look after it."

As well as educating Haitians about working practises, she uses her land to grow trees and reintroduce native species of plants and flowers, some of which she pointed out as we strolled around. "We try to get school groups in here to help the children reconnect with nature and learn about pollution and how important green space is to Haiti," said Jane.

From her house she sells handbags made of recycled plastic – the product of showing local youths how rubbish can be recycled or reused. "I can't change things overnight," she admitted, "but I will keep trying all my life, and my daughter will after me too."

I left Jane to return to the clogged streets of Port-au-Prince. Looking out of the bus window I smiled when I noticed the occasional red flamboyant tree breaking through the stacks of concrete. In the aftermath of such a catastrophic earthquake it would be all too easy (and understandable) to neglect environmental issues, but I spotted further signs of change. The capital's Iron Market, with its stalls selling art, Cuban cigars, vodou paraphernalia and groceries, was rebuilt with the addition of solar panels. And at the Barbancourt distillery – one of the oldest companies in Haiti – leftover sugar cane is burned to produce electricity rather than just left to rot.

As Jean Bernard, a hotelier in Cap-Haïtien, had said to me earlier: "Hollywood put their spin on vodou and now it's time they put their spin on Haiti. After the earthquake has come new hope, and possibilities are only just beginning."

On my last night, I raised a glass of Barbancourt to that sentiment at the Hotel Oloffson. RAM, the local vodou rock band, was beginning to play, and the drums were getting louder. This time I didn't fight it; I let my feet move to the intoxicating beat. ■

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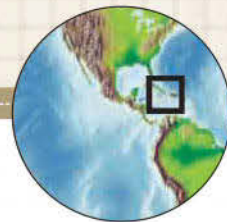
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Haiti Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Port-au-Prince
Population: 10 million
Languages: Haitian Creole, French
Time: GMT-5 (Mar-Nov GMT-4)
International dialling code: +509
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Haitian gourde (HTG), currently around 72HTG to the UK£. Gourde can only be obtained in Haiti. US dollars are widely accepted in hotels, larger stores and by most street vendors. ATMs are hard to find and not reliable. Credit cards are accepted only in larger hotels and stores.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ Cooler season – average temperatures drop to around 22°C.
 ■ Hot and humid. Average temps around 30°C. Hurricane season is Jun-Nov though tropical storms can occur at any time; rain can be heavy but passes quickly.

Health & safety

Despite the headlines, most visits are trouble free. Take usual precautions for major cities: don't walk on your own at night; leave passport and most cash in the hotel safe. Take care when walking in Port-au-Prince: road surfaces are rough, and traffic is fast. Note, the FCO advises against travel to the Port-au-Prince slum districts of Cite Soleil, Carrefour, Bel Air and Martissant. Be up to date with vaccinations, including hepatitis A and cholera. Take malaria prophylaxis – Haiti is high-risk.

Further reading & information

Haiti (Bradt, 2012) – We have three copies to give away; visit wanderlust.co.uk/magazine/competitions. Readers can also get a 40% discount; visit bradtguides.com and enter the code HAITI at checkout (offer ends 30 Apr '15).
experiencehaiti.org – Official tourist site
LATA.org – Latin American Travel Assoc

More online

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ARCHIVE ARTICLES

◆ First 24 hours: Port-au-Prince – issue 151

◆ Alternative Caribbean – issue 106

◆ Haiti Travel Guide

THE TRIP

Getting there

There are no direct flights to Haiti from the UK. **American Airlines** (0207 660 2300, aa.com) flies to Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien daily from Miami (2hrs) and New York (4hrs); returns cost from £183. Flights from London to Miami take ten hours and start from £650 return.

You can fly to Haiti from the Dominican Republic (Santo Domingo or Punta Cana) and Panama with other airlines.

Getting around

You can rent a car, or a car and driver, but the **price is high** (US\$200+ [£128] a day) and conditions difficult. The roads are often unpaved and potholed and other drivers are fast and erratic.

Other options are **publiques** (taxis); these can be hired privately (always agree the fee before departure) or shared (other passengers will be picked up on route). **Moto-taxis** are readily available but you won't be given a helmet and your driver will drive fast. **Tap taps**, the brightly decorated buses and pick-ups, are cheap but hot, often crammed full and slow.

For more comfort, try companies such as **Voyages Lumière** (voyageslumiere.com) and **Agence Citadelle** (agencecitadelle.com), which can organise private, air-conditioned vehicles as well as offering excursions and tours throughout Haiti.

Sunrise Airways (sunriseairways.net) flies daily between Cap-Haïtien and Port-au-Prince; from US\$186 (£119) return.

G Adventures (gadventures.co.uk), **Exodus** (exodus.co.uk), **Intrepid** (intrepidtravel.com), **Steppes Travel** (steppestravel.co.uk), **Undiscovered Destinations** (undiscovereddestinations.com) and **Wild Frontiers** (wildfrontierstravel.com) all offer trips to Haiti including most of the highlights mentioned here. Prices are from around £2,400 for 12 nights.

Cost of travel

While street food, transport and souvenirs – including some beautiful street paintings – can be cheap, accommodation, car hire and some food is **more in line with a US city**.

For a good but basic hotel room with A/C expect to pay upwards of US\$100 (£64). A main meal in a restaurant can cost more than US\$15 (£10); street food and snacks can be less than US\$1 (64p).

Accommodation

There are a growing number of options in Haiti, from cheap, basic hotels to family-run B&Bs and high-end American chains.

In Port-au-Prince it has to be the **Hotel Oloffson** (60 Ave Christophe; hoteloloffson.com), immortalised in Graham Greene's book, *The Comedians*. With its sloping floors, creaking ceiling fans and temperamental showers, this Victorian-style 'gingerbread house' is not five-star, but you will be sleeping in a piece of history. Try to stay on a Thursday, when the resident vodou rock band RAM plays. Doubles from US\$100 (£64).

For something in the capital with more reliable standards, try the family-run **Villa Thérèse** (13 Rue Léon; hotelvillatherese.com). Doubles from US\$175 (£112).

To stay in the heart of Jacmel, choose **Hotel Florita** (www.hotelflorita.com), built in 1888 and one of the few structures to remain standing after the earthquake. Four-poster beds, local art and a chilled vibe await. Doubles cost from US\$80 (£51). Alternatively, to escape the cars and hustle try **La Colline Enchantée** (la-colline-enchantee.com), a collection of yellow villas on the hills above the beach – ask for one with A/C. Doubles from US\$99 (£63).

A 20-minute drive from Cap-Haïtien, **Cormier Plage** (cormierhaiti.com) is great hideaway right on the beach. It offers basic but clean rooms with hammocks outside and cold Prestige in the bar. Doubles from US\$150 (£96).

In Côte des Arcadins, the family-owned **Ouanga Bay** (ouangabay.com) stands out from the large resorts. It has beach views, good food and traditional Haitian décor. Doubles from US\$115 (£74).

Food & drink

Like most things in Haiti, the local food is a fusion of flavours and styles. **Fried plantain** is a staple – either as part of a meal or as crisps for a snack. Main meals always include **diri ak pwa** (rice and beans), often served with chicken, beef or fish. Vegetarians should ask for a meat-less version, though be aware it may be cooked in meat stock. Try **diri ak djon djon** – rice cooked with small mushrooms.

HAITI HIGHLIGHTS



1 Citadelle La Ferrière

Hike or ride a donkey up to this well-preserved 18th-century fort set amid verdant hills.

2 Côte des Arcadins

Find white sand and fresh air on this stretch of coast, an escape from the city for locals and travellers. Do head into the mountain villages behind at Kay Piat – the views are incredible.

3 Port-au-Prince

Haiti's capital has to be experienced to be believed – a chaotic mix of brightly painted tap taps, market vendors and gingerbread houses.

4 Wynne Farm Ecological Reserve

Check out the commendable work being done by the Wynne family, who are trying to teach locals about farming, recycling and looking after the landscape.

5 Bassin Bleu

Find refreshment at these three cascade-splashed cobalt lagoons; climb as high as you dare then plummet from the rocks – or just gasp at your guides.

6 Jacmel

A laid-back sea city with an arty vibe (above). Do visit the FOSAJ art school to see the next generation of local artists creating their masterpieces.



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Pole positions

Getting punted around the waterways is one of the most intimate ways to experience the Okavango's wildlife



OKAVANGO DELTA

T R I P P L A N N E R

Botswana's Okavango is perhaps Africa's most aspirational safari destination. But with its 15,000 sq km of sinuous wetlands and raft of remote lodges, where do you start?

WORDS **WILLIAM GRAY**

Okavango Trip Planner

Several months earlier, good rains had fallen on the Angolan highlands, 1,250km north-west of the parched grasslands through which we were walking. Swollen streams had nourished the rivers flowing south towards Botswana and the Okavango, recharging the delta with its annual pulse of life-giving water. But looking north across the sun-cracked skin of an empty waterhole, I could see no sign of the approaching flood. Instead, catfish skulls lay scattered in the sand, jaws gaping as if fixed in a final gasp for water. A few baboons picked at the dry crust of the pan, while a lone zebra melted in the heat haze.

Then, a thudding like a slow-beating heart. “Wattled cranes,” murmured my guide from beneath his binoculars. “More than 60 of them.” We watched as the V-shaped skein of gangly waders flew just beyond the catfish graveyard, broke formation and tumbled from the sky with their legs hanging down, braced for landing.

Next, slowly and subtly, like the shadow of an approaching cloud, a dark

stain began spreading across the pan towards us. It grew tendrils that reached out through the scuffed grassland and flowed around the base of termite mounds. Water was consuming the clearing.

The flood carried the sweet scent of freshly dug soil. It fizzed through gerbil burrows, evicting their hapless occupants into the waiting bills of storks and egrets. Hurriedly removing our boots, we waded into the now ankle-deep water. Tiny fish flickered through the tea-coloured shallows, while a pair of African fish eagles wheeled overhead.

By dusk, the land had been transformed. Clouds of dragonflies drifted over the newly forged wetland mosaic, and the air was filled with the exuberant castanet-clatter of countless frogs – it was almost as if they were celebrating the miracle of the Okavango in flood.

But ‘the river that never reaches the sea’ is such a sprawling proposition, offering different treasures depending on the season, that it can be difficult to work out when’s best to do your safari. Read on for *Wanderlust’s* guide to one of the best most-difficult decisions you’ll ever have to make. ►



Darkness & light
(clockwise from this)
A dark curtain of
thunderous weather
draws across the
Okavango; a fish eagle
lands a catch; a zebra
feeds on the tall grass

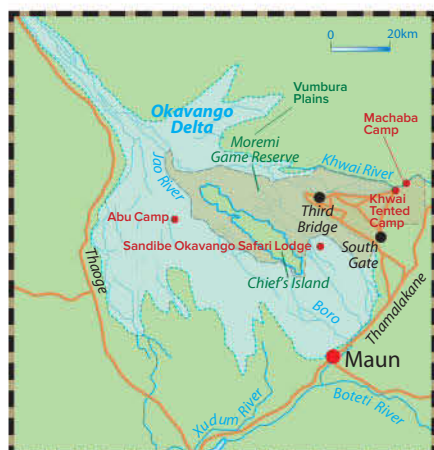


HOW TO DO THE DELTA

Wondering how best to explore the Okavango? Here's a guide to the different safari types, so you can decide what's best for you ...



‘ LODGE-BASED SAFARI



Reaching like a green-fingered hand into the Kalahari, the Okavango Delta is a mixture of wet and dry. Habitats range from permanent floodplains and papyrus swamps to seasonal floodplains and wooded islands. By combining two or three camps in a single visit, you'll not only experience more of the delta's rich palette of landscapes, but you'll also see a greater variety of wildlife and have more things to do.

Broadly speaking, 'dry camps' offer game drives year-round, with a good chance of seeing large mammals such as buffalo, elephant, rhino, zebra and lion. By contrast, 'wet camps' – with access to water even after

the annual floods have receded – focus on boat trips by *mokoro*. Being punted along in these traditional wooden dugouts is a great way to spot small wonders such as the jewel-like malachite kingfisher and painted reed frog. There are also 'mixed camps' that have varying degrees of wet and dry depending on when you visit (floodwaters peak between June and August).

Lying at the heart of the Okavango, Moremi Game Reserve has a bit of everything. One of its most rewarding areas is the Khwai River floodplain where you might be lucky enough to see leopard and wild dog. Located here, Khwai Tented Camp (africanbushcamps.com)



Back seat driver
An elephant-back safari makes its way back to camp

and Machaba Camp (machabacamp.com) are typical of the Okavango's intimate camps with just 14 en-suite tents between them.

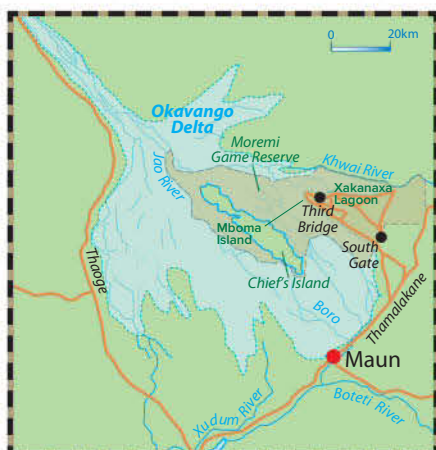
Surrounding Moremi Game Reserve, a patchwork of private reserves offer small, exclusive camps and more flexible rules – you can go off-road and embellish safaris with night drives, walks and horse-riding. Lavish Abu Camp (abucamp.com) even offers elephant safaris, if you're grabbed by the idea of walking and riding through the bush with a family of previously captive elephants that has been returned to the wild. Other luxury options include the spectacular Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge (andbeyond.com), an architectural masterpiece oozing sustainable technology, which reopened in September 2014 following a complete redesign.



MONEY MATTERS

Accommodation might seem pricey, but don't forget that the cost not only reflects the size and exclusivity of the camps, but also the logistics of operating them in remote areas of wilderness. Most safaris also factor in the costs of transfers by light

aircraft from the Okavango's gateway town of Maun. Some private reserves, such as Vumbura, are part-owned by local communities that benefit through employment at camps and the supply of food and furnishings. Some mokoro safaris are as close to budget adventure trips as you'll get – try Go Botswana (gobotswana.co.za).



MOBILE SAFARI

Most travellers opt for a fly-in safari to one of the Okavango's permanent camps or lodges – it's quick and easy, allowing you to minimise hours spent travelling and maximise time on safari, not to mention giving you an aerial perspective of the delta's sinuous waterways and a vulture's eye view of big game.

Mobile safaris, on the other hand, are more reminiscent of the overland expeditions undertaken by early explorers.

Driven by 4WD deep into the African bush, you'll reach parts of the delta far from permanent lodges and stay in camps that have been located to make the most of seasonal conditions and wildlife movements.

At the top end of the scale, the camps are set up for you on arrival and don't skimp on creature comforts. Real beds, feather duvets, Persian rugs, hot showers, silver cutlery and full English cooked



By land or air
A mobile safari offers great opportunities for sunset stop (like the one at the Moremi Wildlife Reserve, left) or experience the sheer density of the wildlife from the air

breakfasts are just some of the refinements you'll find on the five- and seven-day mobile safaris offered by The Uncharted Africa Safari Co (unchartedafrica.com). Travelling from Maun into the Moremi Game Reserve, these small-group adventures link two or three tented camps and include a night at a more basic fly-camp, sleeping under mosquito netting on a remote island in the delta.

Budget mobile safaris in the Okavango are more hands-on. You'll pitch modest-sized dome tents, sleep on bedrolls and help prepare meals – although most operators provide a cook and camp staff as

well as a professional guide. The Old Bridge Backpackers (maun-backpackers.com) offers a choice of catered and self-catered mobile safaris tailor-made to suit your budget and requirements.

Popular spots for camping in Moremi Game Reserve include the Khwai River and Xakanaxa Lagoon. Mobile safaris also regularly pitch up at the forested area around Moremi's South Gate, as well as Third Bridge near Mboma Island, where it's possible to take boat trips into the delta. Indeed, one of the best ways to explore parts of the Okavango on a mobile safari is to travel by mokoro.

FIRST RESERVE

Moremi Game Reserve was created in 1962 by the BaTswana people and was the continent's first reserve proclaimed by native Africans. In the 1970s it was augmented by the addition of Chief Moremi's royal hunting grounds (now known as Chief's Island), and further enhanced in 1992 to include parts of the delta's northern papyrus swamps and permanent wetlands.



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from an elephant

◀ MOKORO SAFARI

Exploring the vast, stretching water trails of the Okavango in one of its ubiquitous *mokoros* (dugout canoes) is not only a slow, stealthy and immensely satisfying way to search for wildlife, but it also puts you in touch with the culture of the delta's indigenous San people. The Bugakhwe and Xanekwe Bushmen have traditionally navigated the delta's maze of reed-fringed channels, poling narrow dugout canoes on fishing, hunting and plant-gathering trips.

A mokoro typically has room for two seated adults. Gliding along, inches above the water's surface, you gain a unique perspective of the Okavango – peering into the bright chalices of water lilies, ducking through lush plumes of papyrus

or marvelling at the vast scale of the delta as you cross an open lagoon.

With no engine noise, mokoro safaris are ideal for birdwatching; you may also spot other often-overlooked creatures, particularly amphibians and insects. Slipping silently past big game – elephants drinking at the water's edge or a herd of lechwe splashing through the shallows – will also hold you rapt. At Kanana Camp (kerdowneybotswana.com) in the south-western delta, mokoros have been given a modern update, with glass bottoms that allow you to peek at what lies beneath the surface.

Numerous camps offer mokoro excursions, spending a morning or afternoon exploring local waterways. In

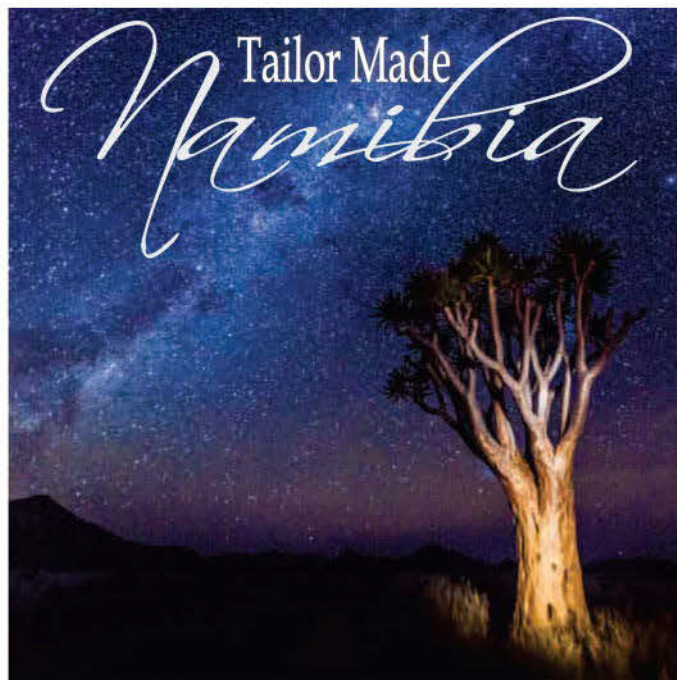
WET WONDERS

Three species of semi-aquatic antelope are found in the Okavango – waterbuck, red lechwe and sitatunga. With its elongated hooves, which can splay outwards and distribute weight across mud and floating vegetation, the sitatunga is most at home in water.



the Moremi Game Reserve, Camp Moremi, Okuti (kerdowneybotswana.com) and Xakanaxa Camp all offer canoe trips. Among the private reserves, Eagle Island offers a cocktail of waterways, from the Boro River to large floodplains and lagoons. Located in the north of the delta, Duba Plains Reserve receives floodwaters as early as April, making it another good place to explore by mokoro. Kwara, Mapula, Vumbura and Xigera reserves all have a mixture of wet and dry habitats, with plenty of opportunities to get afloat.

Multi-day mobile safaris by mokoro are possible with The Old Bridge Mokoro Trails (maun-backpackers.com) and Okavango Polers Trust (www.okavangodelta.co.bw). ▶



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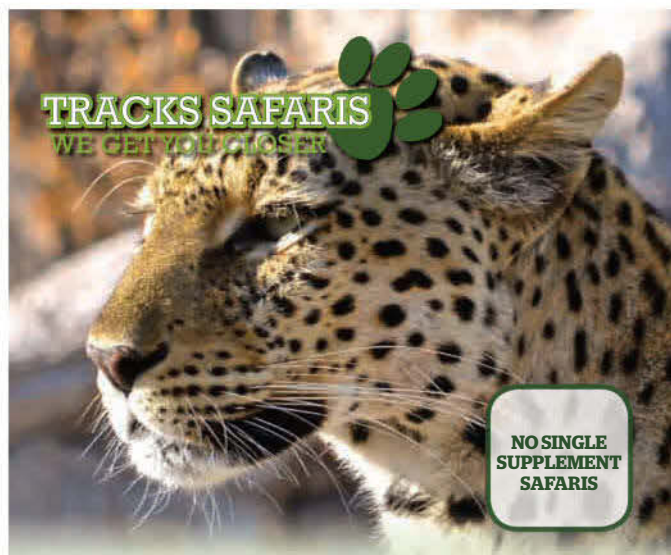
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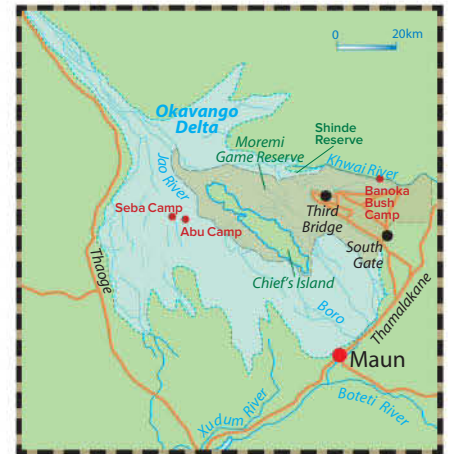
◀ WALKING TRAILS

Setting out on foot in the Okavango, accompanied by a professional guide and armed scout, is a safari of the senses: you can feel the crunch of sunbaked Kalahari sand beneath your boots and smell the heady aroma of wild herbs as you wade through dry grassland. No sound goes unnoticed – from the distant whoop of a hyena to the disgruntled snorts of skittish impala. Crouching next to the graffiti of tracks on a game trail, your guide will reveal the meanderings of pythons and stomping of elephants. And, with luck, you may even time your walk to coincide with the arrival of floodwaters.

Although not as popular as game drives or mokoro safaris, guided walks can be arranged at several camps in the Okavango. Walking is not permitted, however, in Moremi Game Reserve or Chief's Island. Instead, head for private reserves that place an emphasis on dry-land activities. In the Khwai concession, for example, wildlife-

rich floodplains and mopane woodland near Banoka Bush Camp promise excellent game walking. Another camp operated by Wilderness Safaris (www.wilderness-safaris.com), but located on the western side of the delta, Seba Camp overlooks a small lagoon in Abu Reserve and also runs walking safaris.

For the ultimate walking experience in the Okavango, however, Ker & Downey (kerdowneybotswana.com) offers a four-day 'Footsteps across the Delta' safari in Shinde Reserve. Accommodation is in spacious, twin-bedded tents with en-suite flush toilets and hot-water bucket showers. Your chef rustles up culinary masterpieces from the bush kitchen, and there's even a daily laundry service. But as comfortable and eccentric as this sounds, the main emphasis – and undoubted thrill – of these safaris is to walk out into the wilderness each morning, searching for wildlife and honing your tracking skills.



GUIDING STAR

"The best time to visit is during the change of the seasons, April-May and August-September. By April the rains have ended, giving way to cooler temperatures – the abundance of life is staggering. The flora is rich, many species of wildlife have young so predators are very active, and the migratory birds are still here. August and September is the end of winter and the best time for wildlife; the vegetation has thinned out, all the dense growth has been blown over and trampled, and there are very few trees with leaves on – this makes for wonderful wildlife sightings with great photo opportunities." *Adrian Dandridge (tshillifarm.com), guiding delta safaris for over 20 years*

Trail leaders
(this and right) Two different ways of taking care of your charges in the Okavango



The Delta derby
A horseback safari
is an exhilarating
alternative to consider



RIDING SAFARI

Although families should check minimum age requirements for children at some camps, most activities in the Okavango Delta are suitable for anyone with a sense of adventure. Saddling up for a horse-riding safari, on the other hand, is not as simple or straightforward as lowering yourself into a mokoro or lacing up your boots for a walk.



Only confident, experienced riders should consider a horseback safari. Spending between four and six hours a day in the saddle, you need to be capable of riding at all paces, posting a trot for at least ten minutes at a time, controlling your horse at a canter and galloping out of trouble.


That said, there's no denying the sheer exhilaration of spurring an Arab thoroughbred through the sparkling floodplains of the Okavango, galloping alongside lechwe, giraffe and zebra. You will almost feel part of the herd as you splash through lagoons, mingling with elephants or pausing to watch the setting sun lay an amber path across the watery wilderness.

African Horseback Safaris (africanhorseback.com) is based at Macatoo Camp on the western side of the Okavango Delta. A typical safari features daily rides as well as opportunities for game drives (day and night), bush walks, mokoro rides and overnight stays in a treehouse.

KNOW WHERE TO GO

"In the dry season, the best areas for big game tend to be from the centre to the north and west – so Duba, Vumbura, Shinde, Kwara and the areas in and around Moremi. However, in the rains this reverses: head to the west side of the Delta for the big game – and camps in the Jao and Nxabega areas. For more than a fleeting glimpse of wild dogs (*below*) you're almost bound to have to drive offroad. The best Delta concessions for sightings are probably Chitabe, Kwara or Vumbura areas; I've seen dogs in all of these – but the open areas of the latter two were much better for following them." *Chris McIntyre, author of Bradt's Botswana guide & MD of Expert Africa (expertafrica.com)*



Okavango Horse Safaris (okavangohorse.com) has three camps in the delta. With six large en-suite tents strung along the Xudum River to the south-west of Chief's Island, Kujwana Camp serves as a permanent base for PJ and Barney Bestelink's string of 60-plus horses. Further north, Moklowane Camp overlooks plains that are often flooded three weeks before Kujwana, while a mobile fly-camp operates to the south-east. 



More online

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INCREDIBLE CULTURE

Kigali is a modern African capital teeming with ideas. Stroll its museums and markets by day and celebrate with dancing and local food at night. The city's most moving sight is the Genocide Memorial Center – inaugurated on the tenth anniversary of the genocide, it provides insight into the tragic events of 1994.

Dance is a mainstay of Rwandan culture. The finest displays are by the Intore (Chosen Ones); they dance traditional jumping routines in grass wigs, clutching spears. Live performances can be seen at cultural villages, museums and lodges across Rwanda.

If you want a unique souvenir, look for *imigongo* (cow-dung paintings) and woven peace pots, available from craft markets. Rwanda also has the perfect climate for

growing tea, and many of its mountains are cloaked in lush plantations. Take a tour – around Nyungwe, Gisovu or Gisakura – to find out more about your favourite brew.

AMAZING ANIMALS

Rwanda is among Africa's most exciting birding destinations, with over 650 species. Volcanoes NP, Akagera NP and Nyungwe NP are real hotspots – look out for red-faced barbet, shoebill and papyrus gonolek to name a few.

Also, Rwanda has primates aplenty: colobus monkeys, L'Hoest's monkeys, grey-cheeked mangabeys, baboons, pottos... the list goes on. Volcanoes NP is home to the endemic golden monkey; the quality of sightings here is superb. One of Rwanda's most charismatic primates is the chimpanzee, 400 of which live in Nyungwe NP. An easy hike into the forest with a skilled tracker may provide close encounters.

Of course, you can't ignore the gorillas. Tracking these rare creatures through the Virunga Mountains in Volcanoes NP is often described as life-changing. Expert guides will lead you through the jungle to one of the fully-habituated gorilla families; you then get to spend an awe-inspiring hour in their company – sixty minutes you will never forget.



HOW TO WIN

Rainbow Tours, Kenya Airways, Magic Safaris and Rwanda Tourism are offering you and a friend the chance to win a wonderful week-long Gorillas, Chimps and Monkeys in Rwanda trip, including gorilla tracking in Volcanoes and chimp trekking in Nyungwe. Just answer the following:

Q: How many mountain gorillas are estimated to be left in the world?

- a) 880
- b) 3,000
- c) 10,500

To enter (and for full terms and conditions), go to www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer, name and contact info to the Wanderlust address (p2), marked 'Rwanda'. Prize valid for travel February-May or October-early December 2015 or 2016. Closing date: 11 February 2015. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by Wanderlust or the sponsors.



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TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

Become an instant expert
with our travel know-how



The Canadian flag
see p85

■ **This month's experts include:** Self-published wanderer William Gray, p82 ♦
Mindful traveller Paula Gardner, p85 ♦ Insurance expert Wendy King, p86 ♦
Macro imager Steve Davey, p88 ♦ Health guru Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p90 ♦

**Putting pen
to paper**
Self-publishing has
given an outlet to
wannabe authors



■ The *Wanderlust* Masterclass

How to self-publish a travel book

Only a decade ago, most people who'd written a manuscript and fancied themselves as the next Bill Bryson had to get past the gatekeepers at publishing houses first. Cue countless rejections. Now, however, being a published author isn't that difficult, provided you have words on a page and the gumption to do it by yourself. Thanks to the rise of self-publishing platforms and e-readers there are hundreds of self-published writers who have seen success. So, perhaps it's time to give it a go?

Pros & cons

Why self-publish? "It's easy, relatively cheap – and Shakespeare did it, so why not me?" says Paul Bondsfield, who has just released his first book, *Acacia: Secrets of an African Painting*, using an independent publishing platform called CreateSpace. Paul adds: "If you want anyone else to see your work, this is the only way to go." He's right, of course – thousands of writers are trying to make it, which means the book market is inundated and your chances of getting picked up by an agent or publisher are slim.

Getting your manuscript out there isn't the only plus of self-publishing; you get more

control too. You choose your own deadlines, are the master of your own creativity and take home a higher proportion of any profits.

"On the downside, it's just as competitive as traditional publishing," reckons William Gray, *Wanderlust* contributing editor and the author of many an e-book, most recently *WILD Life Stories: 20 Years of Wildlife Travel Writing*. "To make it work you need to treat it with the same care and professionalism as you would if you were pitching to the editorial director of a publishing house."

You may also lose out on the mark of quality that comes with having a publisher says Debbie Chapman, Senior Assistant



'To make it work you need to treat it with the same degree of care and professionalism as you would if you were pitching to the editorial director of a publishing house'

Editor for independent publisher Summersdale (summersdale.com). "Publishing houses act as a kind of gateway, which, some would argue, is more important than ever now that e-books are prolific." With self-publishing you'll also lose out on the expertise publishing houses provide as well as in-house designers, editors, PR departments and sales teams.

Where to start

Having an idea and putting pen to paper is crucial of course, but be sure to research your market too. "Find out what's out there before you commit yourself," advises William. "My first self-published e-book was *The Northern Lights Travel Guide* – there wasn't anything else like it at the time and it has sold well. Other titles, like my *Safari Travel Guide*, haven't worked so well; it's not niche enough in the saturated travel market."

When you think your copy is good to go, think again. Consider paying an editor, a proof reader and a designer to look it over. "My sub-editor made some plot suggestions and spotted grammatical errors," says Paul. "No matter how good you are on grammar and punctuation, you will make mistakes." Paul also hired a designer to help him create the cover: "The worst thing in the world is a great book hidden behind a shoddy cover."

Publishing platforms

There are several self-publishing platforms. CreateSpace (createspace.com) allows you to make paperbacks using a series of online tools while KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing; kdp.amazon.com) is exclusively for e-books; both are run by Amazon. Creating a book is free, but you pay a commission on each sale; royalties vary from 35% to 75%. Smashwords (smashwords.com) also publishes e-books; it charges less commission than Amazon, but doesn't have the same level of brand recognition.

Once you've picked a platform it's easy: each one has a step-by-step guide.

Getting the word out

Self-publishing a book is just the start. Once you've created your magnum opus, you need to commit to self-marketing and publicity. "You'll need to use social media and inbound links from other websites in an attempt to drive traffic to the sites where your books are for sale," says William. Utilise Facebook and Twitter, contact local papers and magazines to see if they'll plug your work, and set up a blog. "It [blogging] is a great way to promote your book," says Debbie. "I love stumbling on a fantastic travel blog that has the potential to become a great book."

Making a profit

The odds are against your book becoming the next *50 Shades of Grey*, so don't give up your day job just yet. "It's a numbers game; you need to sell a lot of e-books at £1.99 each to generate significant money," says William. Don't be deterred though – if you're passionate about writing, self-publishing is still a great way to do what you love and build an audience.

There's always a chance that your book may get picked up by a publisher. "We often get submissions from authors who have self-published their books," says Debbie. "Having lots of sales on Amazon can help influence our decision." However, if the book has sold well and is on a niche topic, that could be a problem. Debbie explains: "You may have already exhausted your ready-made audience! It doesn't leave a large audience for us to target."

More advice

Wanderlust is running 14 seminars at the Adventure Travel Show, at London Olympia, 17-18 January. Each one is headed up by a panel of experts, bringing you the best advice on not only self-publishing but also crafting a pitch, finding your style and formulating a story. Places are limited. Seminars cost £40 and include show entry; subsequent seminars are £20. See www.adventureshow.com.

Case study

PAUL 'MUNGO' MUNGEAM

British TV cameraman Paul 'Mungo' Mungeam has just self-published his book, *MUNGO: Living the Dream*



Tell us about the book

This year marks my 20th year as a cameraman. In that time I've compiled a collection of stories from behind the scenes

of entertainment, sport, travel and adventure TV. My first book, *MUNGO the Cameraman*, covers the first ten years of my career; the new book covers the last ten. If you liked *Planet Earth: Diaries* you'll find these books fascinating and amusing – enjoy!

Why did you self-publish?

Unless you are a big name, most publishers will not touch you. Self-publishing is now relatively easy and allows everyone the opportunity to share their work.

What are the pros and cons?

Pros: the ability to publish at all! Plus full control of how your book looks, and great percentages on return. The big con is that you will have to pay the initial outlay; the quality of the end product determines how much money you'll have to find.

Will you make money?

Once your initial outlays are repaid from sales, yes you can make profit. The margins are better when self-publishing as opposed to being with some big conglomerate.

What advice would you give to potential self-publishers?

Go for it! I was hopeless at English at school and never dreamed that one day I would have written two books (that sold) and could call myself a published author. That still makes me smile. Also, show those big publishing corporations that even though you may not be a big name, you have something very worthwhile to share. After all, it's not all about money! 📺

MUNGO: Living The Dream (RRP £20) is available from Amazon.

TOP TIP

If you publish an e-book, pay close attention to your title. Don't try to be clever or cryptic: the words you choose are the ones search engines will use to enable people to find your book

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Turning an old leaf
The Canadian flag
– with its distinctive
maple shape –
celebrates its birthday



TOP TIP

Etiquette says that when the National Flag of Canada is raised or lowered, everyone should face it, men should remove their hats and all should remain silent.

■ Instant Expert

The Canadian flag

Why are we talking about flags?

Actually, we're only talking about one of them: the Canadian Maple Leaf – the emblem of the North American nation. This month marks 50 years since it became Canada's official flag.

It's only a flag – is it really that exciting?

There's definitely a story to tell. Canadians struggled for decades to create their own emblem. In 1925, and again in 1946, then-Prime Minister Mackenzie King desperately tried to get a national flag adopted, but failed. It wasn't until 1964 that Prime Minister Lester Pearson managed to bring together a committee to design the banner. The winning design was officially adopted on 15 February 1965.

Who came up with it?

The 'father of the flag' title is still contested. Some say George Stanley, a professor at Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario, first came up with the idea for the red-and-white single maple leaf. Others claim it was Brockville MP John Matheson.

So why the leaf?

Hundreds of designs were suggested – variously incorporating everything from beavers to fleur-de-lis to the floating heads of The Beatles. But it was the maple leaf that really stood out, having been used as a national symbol long before 1964. Well before the arrival of Europeans, First Nations people collected maple sap every spring, and historians believe that the leaf was being used as a Canadian emblem from around 1700.

OK, how can I mark the making of the Maple Leaf?

Every National Flag of Canada Day (15 February), towns and cities fly the flag, teach children about its history and hold public ceremonies. Head for the Museum of Argyle, Manitoba, which is home to the largest collection of flags in the country, or Brockville, Ontario, which has contentiously dubbed itself The Birthplace of the Canadian Flag.

Great, I can(ada) hardly wait!

■ 5-step guide to...

TRAVELLING MINDFULLY

Travelling mindfully means being truly present in the moment to better experience its full richness. Here's how:

1 Use your senses

Notice sounds you'll remember long after you get back (cicadas starting, open fires crackling, waves lapping) or smells that conjure up your time away (tuk-tuk fumes, orange blossom, that post-rain aroma). Markets are fantastic places to indulge your senses. Close your eyes to really tune in.

2 Record your journey

Play around with journaling visual descriptions, writing poems or even chronicling your emotional state. Alternatively, compile a visual journal, with photos that capture the moment or quick sketches.

3 Schedule alone time

Even small blocks of time on your own will deepen your experience. You can concentrate on what interests you, with no one else to disturb or distract you.

4 Frequent the same

places By visiting the same cafe for lunch every day, you'll get to know the staff and locals, who are more likely to let you into their lives and give you an insider view of the area.

5 Just watch

When travelling, practise observing, rather than rushing to make sense or a story out of a situation, or even worse, making judgements. 📷

Paula Gardner writes about mindful travel and chilled destinations at www.soothedinthecity.com

ASK THE EXPERTS

How to claim on your insurance; doing Dubai as a lone lady; hiking Peru away from the crowds; coping with travelling on your lonesome – our experts answer your travel queries...

THE EXPERTS



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DON FEENEY

Author, *Gathering No Moss: Memoir of a Reluctant World Traveler*



WENDY KING

Claims Manager, InsureandGo (wanderlustinsurance.co.uk)



GEMMA THOMPSON

Editor, *A Girls' Guide to Travelling Alone* e-book (available on Amazon/iTunes)

Q I always buy travel insurance, but what do I actually do if someone pinches my bag while I'm away?

P Hale, by email

A With most insurance policies, the circumstances of the theft will impact on how you are covered (for example, had you left your belongings unattended – where you could not see them and prevent the theft – is unlikely to be covered) and they also require a police report in cases of theft. The ease of this process, however, depends on where you are. Go immediately to the nearest police station: you'll need a police report within 24 hours of the crime taking place (or at least you noticing it), and the sooner the better. Get a crime number and a report – and ensure you fill in all of the police forms accurately. Don't wait until you get home; if you do, your insurers probably won't pay up. In case your passport is stolen along with your bag, be sure to read through your policy carefully as you may only be covered for certain costs associated with getting an emergency replacement to allow you to travel home. Don't get caught out spending on more than you are covered for!

Depending on the nature of the claim, you'll need to fill in the insurer's own form, send a formal letter, or speak to your insurer on the phone. You'll need to supply all supporting documents, so check your policy to ensure you've got all

bases covered. Make copies and keep the originals. If you're sending anything by post, choose recorded delivery. Your policy may give details of an emergency phone number, or a line to call from overseas. Speak to a representative, and follow the steps they suggest.

Filing an insurance claim when you get home is potentially easier, provided you have all the necessary supporting documents and have checked the terms and conditions and excess (as this may apply to each person claiming). Don't be caught out by time limits, though: once you're back home, it can be easy to keep putting it off. Some policies will void claims if they're not submitted within a certain time frame. Don't leave it to the last minute.

Wendy King, Technical Claims Manager for InsureandGo, Wanderlust's preferred provider (wanderlustinsurance.co.uk)

Q I have a three-day stopover in Dubai. Is there anything I need to consider as a solo female traveller? And what should I do while I'm there?

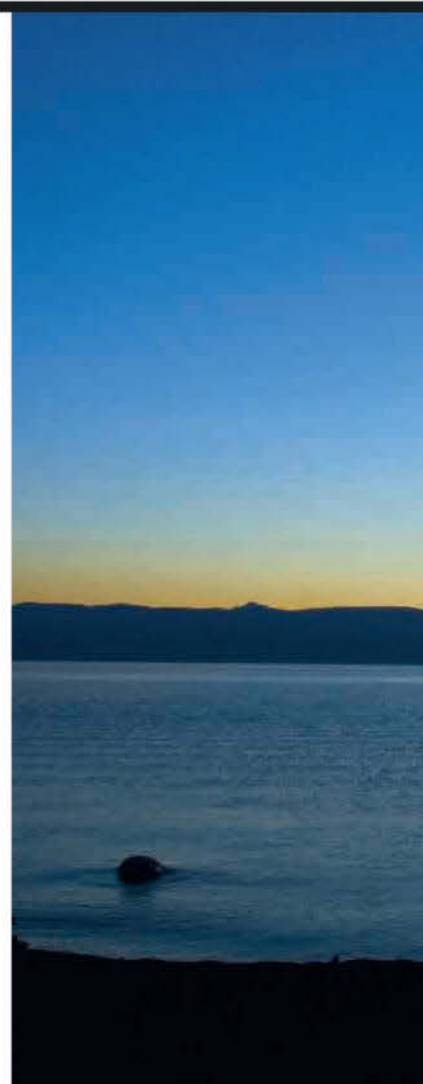
A Always dress respectfully in the UAE – wear loose clothing, covering up from your shoulders down to your knees. If you fancy a dip in the Persian Gulf, many beaches belong exclusively to hotels, but there are also some great options open to the public such as

Al Mamzar – which has an exclusive 'ladies day' on Mondays. Jumeirah Beach Club, also popular with women, is good but note that it may be closed for renovation depending on your travel dates.

There is a bar scene popular with expats, and these are usually attached to quite expensive hotels or restaurants. It's very much a see and be seen kind of vibe (unless you head to the more traditional Irish Village pub).

Once you have visited the spice, gold and perfume souks (a must), you can hire a water taxi (*abra*), for a private meander up and down the Creek – ask your skipper after the commuters have disembarked. This is a great way of seeing the waterside architecture and trading boats.

Gemma Thompson, editor of *A Girls' Guide to Travelling Alone*



Lone look out
Solo trips can
be emotionally
rewarding
experiences

■ Insiders' Guide to...

HAITI



Adventure tour operator Exodus (exodus.co.uk) offers adventures around the globe. Expert **Marta Marinelli** gives her top tips on the most alternative Caribbean nation

WHY HAITI? Haiti is the Caribbean's best-kept secret. Away from the idyllic beaches and palm trees, there is a whole other world of profound heritage, vibrant culture and art, and captivating voodoo traditions.

IS IT SAFE? Leave any preconceptions behind. Haiti's turbulent history and natural disasters have left their scars, but travelling around the country feels safer than ever. Recent reports show that crime rates in Haiti are generally lower than in many of its neighbours. However, bear in mind that tourism is new here so hiring a local guide is strongly recommended for travelling in total safety.

DON'T MISS: Climb to the fortress of Citadelle La Ferrière, explore the mountain peaks of Kenscoff and swim in the cool turquoise waters of Bassin Bleu. For a dip in Haiti's cultural scene, visit the MUPANAH museum, the Iron Village and the Iron Market in Port-au-Prince, and discover the art galleries and streets of Jacmel.

UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES: Take part in a voodoo ceremony: Haitian voodoo is a spiritual practice involving elaborate and fascinating rituals of music, dance and spirit possession. In Port-au-Prince, stay at the Oloffson Hotel, a quirky 19th-century gingerbread mansion set in a tropical garden; here, enjoy a night of authentic live music accompanied by excellent Haitian rum.



'Go to the places you enjoy, and watch how people will gravitate to you. Only a few people have the opportunity to travel alone – embrace it while you can'

Q I want to hike in Peru, but away from the crowds: any advice?

R McGregor, by email

A There are many good trekking options along Peru's Andean spine, and for quieter trails consider travelling either side of the peak months of July and August.

I'd highly recommend the Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhuash for scenic splendour – their alpine lakes, glaciers and towering rock walls are all easily accessed from Huaraz, north of Lima. The

beginning of the dry season in May or early June can be a good choice as though you may encounter some rain, the wild flowers will be out in force, lighting up the hillsides.

These ranges are home to the country's highest peaks, and a whole host of 6,000-ers can be viewed up-close on the Huayhuash or Santa Cruz-Alpamayo Circuits, with routes that are far quieter than the Classic Inca Trail, but more demanding too, with plenty of passes over 4,500m. For real isolation explore one of the

many valleys in the Cordillera Blanca that see few visitors, such as Quebrada Carhuascancha or Quebrada Quilcayhuanca.

Neil & Harriet Pike, authors of the new Trailblazer guide to Peru's Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhuash

Q I'm thinking of going travelling on my own – how can I avoid being lonely? What are the best ways to cope in a strange place, where you know no one?

John, by email

A In my experience, the stigma often associated with travelling alone is unfounded. People are drawn to solo travellers. They respect the individuality, courage and sense of excitement that you possess and that drives your desire to

travel. Use this as a positive. Go to the places you enjoy, and watch how people will gravitate to you. Only a few people have the opportunity to travel alone – embrace it while you can.

It is hard to travel alone, especially the first time. It's similar to the stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. It will be difficult initially. The key, I think, is to recognise the stages and work towards acceptance as steadily as you can. Not only is the sense of achievement great when you get to acceptance, it's extremely rewarding. Soon you'll be firing through the steps so fast your travels will be enjoyable and free of apprehension.

Don Feeney, author of *Gathering No Moss: Memoir of a Reluctant World Traveler*

TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS



Focus on the little things, says **Steve Davey** –


here are his tips on macro photography

When travelling, always keep your eyes open to the smaller things. You never know what you might spot...

Years ago I was in the Parc National Montagne D'Ambre in Madagascar. My guide spied a tiny chameleon, about 20mm long. I always carry a macro lens, so I snapped a few shots. Much later, when trying to identify the species for captioning, I realised it was probably a *Brookesia tristis*, which was only officially discovered in 2012 – six years after I took this photo!

'Macro' essentially refers to any extreme close-up photography. However, your ability to take close-up pictures will be limited by the minimum focusing distance of your lens. A typical DSLR kit lens won't allow you to focus in particularly closely. It is possible to buy clip-on lenses or extension tubes that will help, but if you really want to photograph the miniature world, you need to buy a macro lens.

However, most compact cameras, or even phone cameras, can excel at close-up work as they often have close focusing modes.

To learn more about macro photography, check out the new second edition of Steve's *Footprint Travel Photography* (Footprint £19.99). Also available on iBookstore and Amazon Kindle. 

1 Choose your angle

Get down low – shooting from the subject's level gives a more realistic picture. Also, think about the background: make sure that it is not going to distract from your subject.

2 Focus carefully

Focus is critical – even tiny movements can throw the focus point, blurring vital parts of your image. For perfect focus, move the focus sensor over the area that you want to be sharp. A continuous (or servo) focus mode will continually refocus, so any movements are compensated for.



TOP TIP

Don't be so overwhelmed by big sites when you're travelling that you forget to look at the smaller wonders. Focus on the small details too, to increase the variety of your pictures.

3 Compose for depth

On a close up, you might only get a few millimetres of depth of field. A narrower aperture can help, depending on the light present, but you can make the most of the depth of field by composing so that more of the subject is in the narrow band of focus. Shooting the chameleon side on means that its legs and tail are in the same plane as the eye, and so are sharp.

4 Add some light

Use a flashgun so you can use a smaller aperture, giving greater depth of field and less chance of camera shake. The built-in flash on a DSLR won't work, as the subject will be so close that the lens can cast a shadow; however, you can buy a macro flash unit that fits over the lens. The flash on a compact or smartphone can work, but stick tissue paper over it to soften the light.





TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



Deep breath...
A mask can prevent
inhaling some
airborne bugs

Feeling 'flu-like'?

Aches, sweats, sore throats – all signs of the common flu.

But could your infection be something worse?

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth investigates

Many, many infectious diseases start with 'flu-like symptoms'

– aches, sweats, cough, sore throat. Most begin with fever, and even just a slight rise in body temperature can make you feel unwell and achy. When you're poorly overseas you may start to worry about what you might have picked up, especially if there is no one there to reassure you. Sometimes it is just a cold but what are the chances that it is something horrible – or even deadly? For instance, airport screening looks for travellers with high temperatures whenever there are outbreaks that threaten to cross borders – this is currently happening as a measure to contain Ebola and it has also been implemented during influenza and SARS outbreaks.

If you're feeling feverish, check your temperature. If you've caught an infectious disease and your temperature is raised but

under 38.5°C, be reassured. It is most likely something mild and viral. It is probably not even necessary to get to a clinic as antibiotics will be of little help for fevers running just under or around 38°C.

Next, consider what else is not quite right. Can you pin the origin of your symptoms to the intestines? To the bladder? To a throbbing area of skin? Do you have a cough? Or do you just feel ill all over? Here are the most likely problems.

SKIN INFECTIONS

Most likely in... The bug-infested tropics.

How to tell what's wrong:

Such infections often start from a bug bite or small scratch. An area of skin then reddens, swells and throbs; sometimes red tracks appear, heading towards the heart.

How dangerous? Likely to make you feel very unwell but rapidly curable with a week of antibiotics by mouth. It's not contagious.

Worst case scenario? If neglected it could lead to septicaemia.

What to do: Prompt and thorough wound-cleaning avoids this. Once it has progressed to cause fever, you need to find a clinic; a course of flucloxacillin or erythromycin will probably be prescribed.

SOMETHING INTESTINAL

Most likely in... Everyone, anywhere, especially where sanitary facilities are poor.

How to tell what's wrong: Gut infections are usually obvious, though sometimes fever comes before diarrhoea; in typhoid there can be constipation. Fever implies bacillary dysentery, typhoid or paratyphoid.

How dangerous? Most infections of the gut will settle but there are some nasty variants and it is wise to get checked, especially if symptoms are worsening or going on and on. These infections are contagious, readily transmitted

to others by way of unwashed hands after loo use.

Worst case scenario? Some E coli infections as well as typhoid and paratyphoid can kill, though deaths are rare. Find a doctor if very unwell.

What to do: Drink plenty of clear fluids and attend a clinic with a sample.

BLADDER TROUBLES

Most likely in... Those who have an active love-life or don't keep well-hydrated.

How to tell what's wrong: Generally you'll pee more frequently and there is pain at

TOP TIP

Travel with paracetamol. A dose will often make you feel much better and often helps sort serious infection from a common cold.



'Airport screening looks for travellers with high temperatures whenever there are outbreaks that threaten to cross borders'

WHAT ARE FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS?

- ◆ High temperature (fever)
- ◆ Sweats and flushing
- ◆ Aches and pains in muscles and joints
- ◆ A dry cough
- ◆ Sore throat
- ◆ Sneezing
- ◆ Headache

throats are a sign of anything dangerous. You are likely to be infectious but most infections will not be unduly harmful.

Worst case scenario? This could be Ebola or Marburg virus. Don't travel. Find local medical help.

What to do: If your temperature is over 38.5°C find a clinic to see if antibiotics are needed.

HOT & ACHING ALL OVER

Most likely in... The tropics and sub-tropics; sub-Saharan Africa has a range of nasty infections.

How to tell what's wrong: You can't, but you might need blood tests. Malaria must be kept in mind as a possibility in many warmer parts of the globe. If it isn't malaria it could be

meningococcal disease (also rapidly fatal) or some rarer malady like bird flu or dengue.

How dangerous? It is possible to die from meningococcal septicaemia or malaria within 24 hours of the first symptom.

Worst case scenario? HIV, falciparum malaria and meningococcal disease are all possible. Each have different treatments. Get checked.

What to do: Get an urgent medical assessment and diagnosis. 🏥

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth has been frequently reassured by her thermometer. Her blog is at www.wilson-howarth.com.

the end of urination; there may also be lower back pain. Men can get an infection within the scrotum (epididymitis).

How dangerous? Not especially, but debilitating and you'll want to get treatment. These problems are not infectious, even to sexual partners.

Worst case scenario? Bladder stones cause one of the worst pains known; clinics can administer strong pain relief.

What to do: Drink plenty of juices, acidify your urine by adding baking soda to drinks and find a doctor if the symptoms continue.

COUGH

Most likely in... Everyone, anywhere, especially after a flight.

How to tell what's wrong: A cough, expectorating green mucous and/or undue breathlessness could be a chest infection, or sinusitis.

How dangerous? Not very, but infectious until you've taken antibiotics for 24 hours.

Worst case scenario? Some severe influenzas can lead to pneumonitis and respiratory failure. This is rare but can kill.

What to do: If your temperature is over 38.5°C find a clinic to see if antibiotics are needed.

SORE THROAT

Most likely in... West Africa, which has a range of nasty possibilities, and in China and South-East Asia, where bird flu is a possibility.

How to tell what's wrong: Some of the nastiest infections can produce a sore throat and high fever so, depending on where you are, consider the possibility of life-threatening illnesses. The commonest cause is simple bacterial tonsillitis, which can cause a fever of around 40°C. Glandular fever is common the world over too and makes people feel very unwell.

How dangerous? Few sore

WIN SmartWool high-performance socks

From trail hikes to frosty bikes, **SmartWool** socks will support you wherever you wander...

There's more to socks than padding: they're a much-needed barrier between your feet and those all-important walking boots. Here's where **SmartWool** comes in. From socks fit for fishing, snowboarding or hiking – to name a few – to an over-the-knee compression offering, perfect for wintry conditions and air travel, it has the support and comfort that your foot will need.

Think endurance challenges along Turkey's 800km Carian Coast, or tracking mountain gorillas in Uganda. In fact, wherever your wanderlust takes you in 2015 and whatever activity you're doing, a pair of SmartWool socks will keep your tootsies protected.

TOTAL COMFORT

SmartWool's stylish **PhD high-performance sock** has been designed for optimum comfort, durability and endurance. Using award-winning ReliaWool technology, the highest wear areas of the socks are reinforced so that intrepid travellers can go even further without experiencing wear and tear.



Meanwhile SmartWool's new enhanced **4 Degree Elite Fit System** provides full support for the 26 bones, 33 joints and innumerable muscles, tendons and ligaments that make up your foot. It has four elastic bands that gently encase the foot, which provides talking not just support, but also comfort while you're taking in the snow-dusted trails of the Himalayas.

If that's not enough, special mesh vent zones help with moisture and temperature control, so you don't overheat when pedalling past Italy's Lake Garda. Forget about carrying plasters too – the system's exceptional fit means no slipping or sliding.

PROTECT YOUR BODY

But SmartWool doesn't just do socks. There are its Merino wool baselayers which are non-itch, odour-repellent and breathable; a variety of lightweight jumpers and bottoms and a colourful selection of beanies, scarves and both technical and casual gloves to protect your extremities from the cold.

Perfect whether you're trekking far-flung Arctic outposts like Norway's Svalbard, pedalling up the Alps or just enjoying some rugged trekking in Yellowstone National Park, this broad range means that you can be comfy on all your future travel adventures.



HOW TO WIN

SmartWool is offering **TEN** Wanderlust readers two pairs of SmartWool socks each (retailing from £22). To enter, simply answer the following question:

Q: The average SmartWool socks have how many fibres of wool?

- a) 5,000
- b) 50,000
- c) 500,000

To enter, and for full terms & conditions, visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer and contact info on a postcard to the Wanderlust office (p2). State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by Wanderlust or sponsors. Closing date for entries is 11 February 2015.

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For more information visit www.SmartWool.com

■ Traveller's Guide To...

SLEEPING BAGS

Whether you're hiking hut to hut, camping up a mountain or trying to get some kip on an overnight train, your choice of sleeping bag can make, or break, your night

FIT

Some bags come in a standard, unisex sizing, which usually means a man's fit. Women-specific sleeping bags are often wider around the hips, narrower around the shoulders and with extra insulation at the feet. Some men may prefer women's bags; conversely, taller, slimmer women may prefer a men's or unisex option.

EXTRA FEATURES

Some bags offer extra quirky features – an attached torch, built-in mosquito net, the ability to transform into a jacket. Consider whether these features are important to you. Or would you rather spend your money on an extras-free warmer/lighter bag?

TEMPERATURE RATINGS

Every sleeping bag has a temperature gauge. The Comfort level is the one to look for, as this tells you how cool it can be before you start to feel cold – the lower the temperature the better. You'll notice there's also a Limit and Extreme temp noted (or variations on these terms). As everyone feels cold/heat differently, use the Comfort figure as a guide to the bag's limitations.

WEIGHT

The ideal bag combines low weight and high warmth. Also, look at how small it packs down in its compression sack – can you fit it in your luggage?

FILL

Sleeping bags are filled with one of two types of insulation: down (eider, goose or duck) or synthetic (a mixture of manmade fibres).

Naturally light, down insulation generally offers the best warmth-to-weight ratio. It is usually a mix of feathers and down; the higher the down content, the better it will be at trapping warm air, but the more expensive it will be. Manufacturers advertise a 'fill power' (eg 500, 700 etc) – the higher the number, the higher the quality of the down and the more efficiently it will keep you warm.

Synthetic insulation can be as warm as down though usually doesn't pack quite as small. It also works well even when wet (when down gets wet it will stop insulating, unless it is hydrophobic). The cheaper the fill (and bag), the less efficient it is likely to be.

SHAPE

Bags are usually rectangular or a tapered 'mummy' shape. The former offers more space and can be unzipped to make a duvet; the latter, due to its closer fit, is better for heat retention.

ZIPS

Look for two-way zips that open the length of the sleeping bag, so you can open the bottom end to vent your feet if necessary. Check that there is a good size baffle of fabric and fill behind the zips to keep out draughts.



Sleeping bags

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...

SNUGPAK

Travelpak 3 £50

THE TEST: This bag is the heaviest on test (1.61kg in its stuff sack) and also the largest when packed up. Part of the reason for this is that it's stuffed full of synthetic fibres, which don't compress as much as down. This does mean it's toasty, though – with a Comfort rating of -3°C, this bag is the warmest here.

There's a two-way zip so you can cool down in hotter weather, a baffle behind the zip to stop draughts (though this is smaller and less filled than on more expensive models) and an internal zipped mesh pocket. There's also a mosquito net that you can roll away when not needed or zip over your head for protection – though you'd have to find a way to suspend it somehow to make it properly effective.

The outer fabric is robust and features antibacterial and antimicrobial treatment to minimise odours without the need for frequent washing. However, it is only available in one size and, as it's less tapered in shape, it may not retain heat as efficiently as others.

The verdict: A good budget option with some nice extras although lacking the great warmth-to-weight ratio of pricier bags.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Warmth to weight: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.sungpak.com



VANGO

Planet 150 £55

THE TEST: Like Snugpak's offering – filled with 100% synthetic fibres, has a mosquito net, retails at a good price – the Planet 150 has also been designed with travellers in mind. It has an anti-bacterial treatment to help stop odours and an insect-repellent finish to keep away mossies and midges. The stuff sack is fleece-lined so, if reversed and packed with clothes, can double up as a pillow. The two-way zip opens completely so the bag can be used duvet-like if needed.

There is an internal Velcro pocket but no real neck baffle; there is one behind the zip, which is smaller than others here but well filled. The result of all the extras and the synthetic fill is that this is the second-heaviest on test (1.29kg in stuff sack) and second-largest when packed. It has a comfort rating of 4°C though the less tapered shape and one-size-fits-all sizing means that heat retention may be an issue.

The verdict: Some great extra features make this a versatile bag at a good price; however, it's not the warmest option and its heavy weight may be a turn off.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Warmth to weight: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.vango.co.uk



RAIDLIGHT

Combi-Duvet - Ultralight

£190

THE TEST: A big price jump leads into more technical territory, and sleeping bags that offer quirky options – such as the Combi-Duvet. Filled with 95% goose down, it is noticeably thinner than all the others here. However, with a fill power of 725 and a comfort rating of 5°C, it offers a reasonable amount of warmth for the weight – this is the lightest on test (658g in stuff sack) and packs down second-smallest.

The slightly odd shape is due to the fact that it converts into a gilet/jacket (via two zipable arm holes). As a sleeping bag it has a two-way zip down the front, which is not full length. It has no real neck baffle but it does have a small one behind the zip. It's more mummy-shaped but quite boxy at the top.

Due to the conversion method, as a jacket it is quite heavy at the back, which causes it to pull down a bit. This is a one-size-fits-all model, which is quite apparent both when worn as a jacket and used as a sleeping bag.

The verdict: A quirky, superlight sleeping bag that is also a sleeveless jacket, but it's not as warm as others, and sizing may be an issue.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Warmth to weight: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

firstascentoutdoordistribution.co.uk





How we did the test...

We asked gear manufacturers to submit the three-season sleeping bags that they felt were most suitable for travellers, offering good warmth, a low weight, a small pack size and any extras useful for travellers. From the ten we were sent, our editor, Phoebe Smith, took them out on the road to see which performed best. The six here are all 'Wanderlust Approved', with a 'Value Buy' and overall 'Best in Test' being indicated.

THE NORTH FACE

Kazoo Gold £200

THE TEST: Pay a little more and you get a more traditional sleeping bag with some nice design touches. Stuffed with 650+ fill goose down, and with a water-resistant outer fabric, this bag is a good all-rounder for most temperatures. It also has thermal pads in key areas to help with insulation.

Weighing 1.03kg (in stuff sack), it's the fourth-lightest here and packs down to a similar size as the Snugpak bag. It has a comfort rating of 2°C, with a good-sized, well-filled neck and behind-zip baffle to help keep draughts to a minimum. It is mummy-shaped for good heat retention, has a well-filled hood and is also available in a women's specific fit. There is a two-way zip for ventilation if needed; a nice touch is a glow-in-the-dark zip pull.

It may have a higher price tag, but for a decent bag that works for trips to both warmer and cooler climes, it's a good option.

The verdict: Well-designed at a reasonable weight, though its bigger pack size and lower fill power may cause some to opt for a slightly more expensive model.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Warmth to weight: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.thenorthface.co.uk



SALEWA

Fusion-2 £260

THE TEST: Throw in another £60 and you can buy a sleeping bag that blends water-repellent duck down and synthetic Primaloft together in what Salewa calls its Silver Insulation blend. Equivalent to 650 fill power, it combines the light weight you get from down (937g in stuff sack, third-lightest here), with the high-performance-even-when-wet quality expected from synthetic fill. It has a comfort rating of 2°C – quite impressive, given its pack-size is the smallest on test.

Inside there is a zipable pocket and a small but well-filled baffle at the zip. It would have benefited from a neck baffle, which it sadly lacks. There is a two-way zip for ease of venting and the zip pull is nice and chunky so easy to find even when fumbling about in the dark.

There's no women's specific fit, just a one-size-fits-all model; however, its tapered mummy shape is good for heat retention.

The verdict: A good balance of warmth to weight, with a good packsize – it's just a shame it is missing a neck baffle and is only available in unisex sizing.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Warmth to weight: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.salewa.com



RAB

Neutrino 400 £350

THE TEST: If money is no object then you really can't go wrong with this option from Rab. It is packed full of 800-fill hydrophobic goose down – all of the down and feathers have a waterproof Nikwax coating so will still keep you warm even when wet. The down is also ethically sourced, and bags hand-filled by Rab's experts in England.

With a tapered mummy shape, it has excellent heat retention; a generous neck and behind-the-zip baffle help keep out draughts. A two-way zip allows ventilation. There is also an internal zip-up pocket.

Thanks to a superlight but breathable Pertex Quantum outer fabric, it weighs an impressive 883g (in stuff sack, second-lightest here) and has the third-smallest pack size, making it travel friendly. The comfort rating is 2°C and it comes in both a men's and women's specific fit. The only drawback is the price, but then, you do get what you pay for.

The verdict: A high-quality waterproof down sleeping bag that's superlight, extremely packable and warm. The perfect package – if you can afford it.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Warmth to weight: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.rab.uk.com



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Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year

The shortlisted images from this prestigious photography competition will be on display at both shows in a stunning gallery. The winners will be announced at the London show on Friday 30 January.



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*Maximum two tickets per order. Booking fee of £1.50 per ticket applies. Advance box office closes: Manchester – 14 January 2015 and London – 28 January 2015.
†Calls cost 10p per minute plus network extras. Photograph courtesy of John Devereux, Finalist in the Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year competition. Information correct at time of going to press.





Wanderlust
**TRAVEL
PHOTO
OF THE
YEAR**
THE
WINNERS
RETURN

JORDAN

Last year we sent the winners of our 2013 competition on a photo commission to Jordan – and here are the spectacular results

"I knew Jordan was a beautiful land steeped in history, mythology and vibrant culture. I was looking forward to absorbing as much as I could in the little time that I had. There was too much to be captured..."

Sandipan Mukherjee, Travel Photo Of The Year 2013, People category winner

The rich reds of the rippling desert. The turquoise shimmer of the Red Sea. The neat, bright pyramids of spices in the souks. The rock-hewn handiwork of ancient civilisations. Jordan may be compact but it is endlessly photogenic.

For this reason, it made the perfect destination for the winners of our 2013 Travel Photo of the Year competition. So we sent our talented foursome on a commission to Jordan to see how they would capture its myriad marvels.

Ancient treasures

"Without question, my favourite place was Petra," enthused Landscape winner Andy Barnes. "I am a construction project manager and at times I just stood there wondering how on earth they completed the construction works to such a standard. Unbelievable."

The ancient Nabataean city is indeed one of the historic highlights of Jordan; walking (or riding) along the narrow Siq to arrive at the Treasury is one of travel's greatest experiences. But Jordan has plenty

of other manmade wonders – from the Roman ruins at Jerash, where chariots still race around the hippodrome, to the giant Crusader castle at Karak and the beautiful Byzantine mosaics at Madaba.

Biblical beauty

Jordan is not short on natural splendour either – much of it imbued with myth, legend and historical import. "I wanted to stand atop Mt Nebo and have a view of the Promised Land, as Moses had, thousands of years ago," says winner Sandipan Mukherjee. "It was a dream come true."

Biblical resonance is in abundance. You can explore the offbeat archaeological site of Umm Qais (known as Gadara in ancient scripture) and gaze across to the Sea of Galilee. You can stand where Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist at Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan. And you can float in the Dead Sea, which is mentioned in the Bible multiple times.

Andy Barnes' feel for a landscape was certainly rewarded. "One of my most memorable – or strangest – moments was walking into the Dead Sea and just floating; being buoyant just didn't seem right."

Desert days

About 85% of Jordan is classified as desert – largely empty wildernesses ruled by Bedouin, camels and Mother Nature. That doesn't mean it's all the same of course: the desert environments vary hugely. "I took my favourite image in Wadi Rum," says

Angela Osborne, winner of the Wildlife category. "It was very peaceful and serene watching the sunset; I was lying down, watching the colours change all around me in the surrounding sands."

Wadi Rum's weird, otherworldly rocks and opportunities for camping out in under the starry skies in traditional tents make it a plum spot for experiencing Jordan's great outdoors. Alternatively, try trekking through rocky, wildlife-rich Dana Biosphere Reserve or scrambling through the boulders and waterfalls of the wild Mujib river valley.

Magic moments

Travel photography is taken as it happens. It is not staged; you need to always have your camera ready to catch an odd or unusual moment. Fortunately, as our competition winners found, Jordan is liberal with its 'moments': perhaps the first rays of an apricot sunset warming the desert; the arching silhouette of a youth diving into the Red Sea; the mischievous twinkle in a camel-herder's eyes as he beckons you to mount his beast.

"Standing beside an ancient relic on Amman's Citadel Hill, I gazed at the modern skyscrapers towards the west, gleaming in the afternoon sun," recalls Sandipan. "Suddenly, the air was filled with the *adhan* [call to prayer] recited from a mosque somewhere. It was pure magic."

And that just about sums Jordan up: magical indeed. 

Meet the photographers



SANDIPAN MUKHERJEE
People category winner

"Seen from the plane, even before we touched down, Jordan's desolate, reddish landscape seemed to radiate a strange charm. I was even more impressed with the hospitality extended to us.

My favourite place was the Siq in Petra. I had read and heard so much about it that I was almost ready to be disappointed. It still took my breath away."



ANDY BARNES
Landscape category winner

"The landscape photography opportunities in Jordan were at dawn and dusk, when the colours were best. Finding locations was not difficult, but to get the scale you needed an object – people, camels – in the shot too. My favourite shot was taken from a tent above the Monastery at Petra, when a man stood and stared at the structures in amazement, just as I'd done earlier."



ANGELA OSBORNE
Wildlife category winner

"It was my birthday while I was in Jordan. On the day, I woke at 5am in a Bedouin Camp for a camel ride in the desert. We found a good spot and our guide lit a fire so we could drink tea as we watched the sunrise. It's a memory that will stay with me forever.

Winning the competition has given me real motivation to keep on pushing myself and to pick a camera up when I'm at home to practise."



ULRICH LAMBERT
Icon category winner

"The icon I really wanted to capture was the Treasury at Petra – it is *the* icon of Jordan. There are so many shots of it. So I decided to 'remove' the tourists by masking them with a foreground of pottery, which also adds a touch of local culture.

I was amazed by the diversity of Jordan. It's a dream destination if you like archeology, adventure, desert, wildlife and good food!"

For full interviews with our photographers see www.wanderlust.co.uk/153



Taking pictures, making memories

(previous page) "As you walk through the narrow gorge to the city of Petra you start to get a glimpse of the Treasury until it opens out and you see it in all its glory. The light changes throughout the day throwing different colours and shadows into the picture" *Angela* (clockwise from top left) "I particularly like my shot of a teenager diving into the Red Sea. This was taken at 1/8,000sec, at wide angle, facing the sun. It breaks all the rules but I like the result" *Ulrich*

"A treasury guard in Petra" *Ulrich*

"We trekked up Wadi Mujib through the stream – I wish I'd had my underwater compact, as there were opportunities for some great action shots. The sun hit the rock faces showing their amazing range of colours" *Andy*

"On the way to Ajloun Castle I bought Arabic tea from this wonderfully dressed gentleman" *Angela*

"According to our guide, heavy minerals precipitated through pores in sandstone, were oxidized, and created these strange patterns over ages. The 'heart' at the centre of the image prompted me to take this shot" *Sandipan*

"I wanted to show the undulating landscape that characterizes Amman which, though originally built over seven hills, now sprawls over nineteen hills" *Sandipan*

"Our guide Mostafa warned us not to stroke Zachy, one the grumpier camels! He also told us proudly that Zachy was also a racing camel, fast and strong" *Angela*





Chasing the light

(clockwise from top left)

"After staggering up 900 steps it was amazing to find Petra's Monastery carved into the rock" *Andy*;

"I particularly wanted to photograph Wadi Rum by night" *Ulrich*; "The sun hit the rocks at Wadi Mujib, helping to show their formations and colours" *Andy*;

"We sat down, set the cameras up, had a cup of Bedouin Tea tea and waited for the sun to rise at Wadi Rum" *Andy*







Light fantastic
"Wadi Rum was my favourite place. Just be careful with sand and dust. I shot mostly with my standard zoom and my ultra wide-angle. The light is so good that you don't even need a fast lens" *Ulrich*







Moving through the dust of time

(clockwise from top left) "A tripod is essential for Petra – you'll get better shots with an entry level camera and a tripod than with a pro camera without a tripod" *Ulrich*; "A horse carriage in Petra" *Ulrich*; "Amman's Roman Temple of Hercules is said to have been built 162-166 AD. The Citadel complex has magnificent view over Amman" *Angela*; "We were taken to a sunrise jeep tour in Wadi Rum. As we gazed in awe at the orange sun, I heard a human voice behind us. As I turned around I saw this Bedouin with his camels, hurtling forward at dawn towards some unknown destination." *Sandipan*





Jordan Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Amman
Population: 7.9 million
Language: Arabic
Time: GMT+2 (Mar-Oct GMT+3)
International dialling code: +962
Visas: Required by UK nationals.
 A one-month visa costs JD20 (£18) and can be obtained on arrival at the airport.
Money: Jordanian dinar (JD), around JD1.10 to the UK£. Major currencies (UK£, US dollars, euros) are easily changed at banks.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- Spring and autumn are the best times to visit Petra and Wadi Rum; temperatures average around 25°C.
- Low humidity means summers are tolerable, although doing anything active is a challenge in temperatures that can exceed 35°C. Ramadan is 18 June-17 July in 2015.
- Winter can be chilly, especially in the desert.

Health & safety
 Be up to date with standard vaccinations. Those staying for more than 30 days must have an HIV test. The FCO advises against all but essential travel to within 3km of the Syrian border – see gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.

Further reading & information
Jordan (Rough Guides, 2013)
Jordan (Insight Guides, 2013)
Jordan (Lonely Planet, 2012)
Jordan (Bradt, 2012)
Treks & Climbs in Wadi Rum (Cicerone, 2010);
visitjordan.com – Jordan Tourism Board

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THE TRIP

i The winning photographers travelled courtesy of the **Jordan Tourism Board** (visitjordan.com). They stayed in hotels across the country, including the characterful **Petra Guest House** (guesthouse-petra.com) and the Bedouin-style **Captain's Camp** in Wadi Rum (captains.jo).

✈ Getting there
Royal Jordanian (0207 878 6300, rj.com/en) flies daily from Heathrow to Jordan's Queen Alia International Airport (AMM); direct flights cost from £394 return. **Aegean** (aegeanair.com) flies Gatwick-AMM several times a week. Flights take about five hours. Both airlines also offer cheaper indirect fares.

The airport is about 16km south of Amman. **Taxi prices are fixed:** expect to pay around JD22 (£20) to reach downtown Amman. **Express buses** depart every 30-60 minutes, 6am-midnight (JD3 [£2.70]; journey time 45 minutes).

🚌 Getting around
 Driving between Jordan's major sites is straightforward. **Main roads are well maintained, with little traffic.** You can rent a car at the airport; you'll need an International Driving Permit (gov.uk/driving-abroad).

Speak to your hotel reception/concierge for advice when organising long-distance taxis (and avoiding scams). There are **good bus services**, including an early-morning option from Amman to Petra (jett.com.jo).

£ Cost of travel
 Jordan is **relatively inexpensive**. Eating out is good value; alcohol is similar to UK prices. Expect to pay £15-30 for a restaurant meal. **Tipping is expected for all services.** Standard hotels offer singles from around £10pppn; ecolodges and higher-end properties start from around £70pppn.

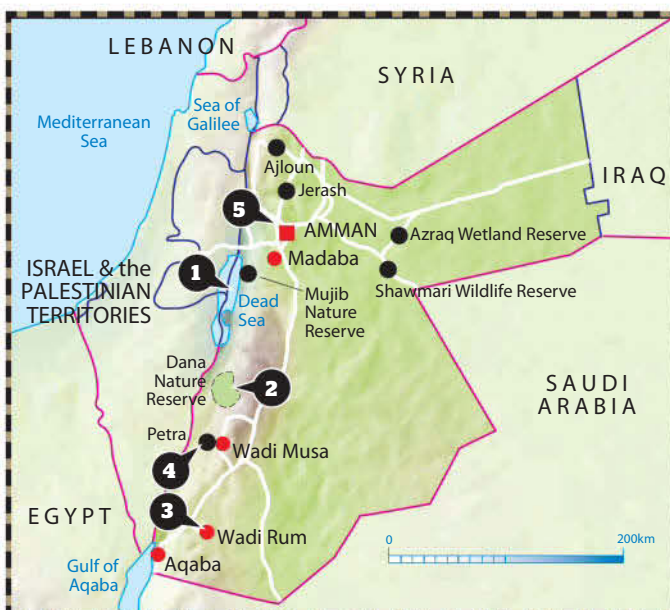
🛏 Accommodation
 You can find top-end, mid-range and basic hotels; some desert resorts offer camping options. At the budget end, there are plenty of hostels and Bedouin camps. Conveniently located, the **Petra Moon Hotel** (petramoonhotel.com; doubles from JD55 [£50]) is a good mid-range option.

🍴 Food & drink
 Jordanian staples include **mansaf** (a rich blend of rice, lamb and rehydrated yoghurt) and fragrant **zarb** – Bedouin barbecue. **Street food is popular;** pick up a falafel sandwich or bowl of steaming **medames** (beans) when on the go; wash it down with an Arabic coffee or **qamar eddine** (apricot juice).



JORDAN HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Dead Sea**
 The Dead Sea has a salinity of over 30%, so you can float with ease atop its gentle waves. Saltily serene.
- 2 Dana Biosphere Reserve**
 Spot a multitude of rare animals and birds – from the desert-dwelling Nubian ibex to the Syrian serin – amid 320 sq km of rugged, ridged landscape.
- 3 Wadi Rum**
 Experience Bedouin life by camping overnight in the Arabian Desert. By day, explore the wadi's troglodyte caves, confounding stone formations and dramatic wilderness (pictured).
- 4 Petra**
 Built by the Nabataeans some 2,000 years ago, this ancient rock-cut city will amaze, no matter how many photos you've seen. The most atmospheric way to experience it is to walk through the Siq to come face-to-face with the famed Al Khazneh (Treasury).
- 5 Amman**
 Jordan's capital mixes ancient history with a modern feel. Head downtown to find a hodgepodge of pavement cafés and souks selling everything from vegetables to hand-woven rugs.




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Just say the words 'Atlantic Canada' and you can virtually feel the sea-spray on your face, hear the clank of jostling masts and smell the bracing air. The eastern coastlines of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Québec are steeped in maritime heritage, and very much places of the sea – as evidenced by everything from the traditions of their inhabitants to the colourful architecture along their shores. They are also a haven for wildlife, from puffins and gannets in thousands-strong colonies to curious seals and a whole host of whales.

Consequently, it is a region best seen by ship. To sail between its lively ports, national parks and little-known islands is to get a real feel for maritime Canada. Win this nine-night expedition with **Exodus Travels**, and you could be doing just that.

WILD WATERS

Eastern Canada is magnetic to wildlife. Here, the waters of the Atlantic, Arctic and Gulf of St Lawrence meet, churning up nutrients: a feast for an enormous array of species. Several types of whales come to gorge on this super soup, so an expedition in this region might elicit sightings of breaching humpbacks, arcing minke and even the mighty blue – the planet's biggest creature. Anticosti Island – a mysterious isle at the mouth of the St Lawrence – is a good place to keep a look out. Grey and harp seals are common companions in these waters too.

Bird-lovers will be in their element. For instance, the well-named Bird Islands off Cape Breton are home to huge, squawking colonies of great cormorant, Atlantic puffin, Atlantic razorbill and black-legged kittiwake; you might even see majestic bald eagles, swooping down to catch



fish. Île Bonaventure, on Québec's Gaspé Peninsula, is a protected reserve that can be visited by small Zodiac boats, allowing close encounters with one of the largest northern gannet colonies in the world, numbering over 120,000 birds. And on St-Pierre et Miquelon, a little-known island still under French control, there is a heaving puffin colony, where you can watch hundreds of the comical birds dashing around, their colourful bills crammed full of fish.

PEOPLE OF THE SEA

The landscapes of Atlantic Canada mirror the ocean itself: wild, windswept and untamed. There are vertiginous cliffs and strange, sculptural rock formations, perilous sandbars and marooned,



unpopulated isles. Only a small population of resilient people live along this shore, their lives closely entwined with the sea, their towns dotted with bright clapboard houses and piles of lobster pots.

For instance, visit the remote Îles de la Madeleines, in the Gulf of St Lawrence, to explore unique fishing communities, pretty harbours and spectacular ripples of sandstone. Meet up with the locals in Bonne Bay, deep in Gros Morne National Park, to hike up into Newfoundland's dramatic Tablelands. And in tiny, isolated Francois, perched on the edge of an eye-watering fjord, be prepared: you might get invited to the local community hall dance.

THE PERFECT SHIP

The sturdy *Akademik Ioffe*, an ice-strengthened Polar Adventure ship, is the perfect vessel for an Atlantic wildlife expedition. Stable and quiet, the *Akademik Ioffe* carries just 96 passengers, ensuring an intimate experience. This also means all guests can enjoy Zodiac excursions to get closer to the epic wildlife, landscapes and culture that make Atlantic Canada as essential as it is unique.

How to win

Exodus Travels is offering one lucky *Wanderlust* reader and a companion an incredible nine-night Maritime Wildlife Adventure aboard the *Akademik Ioffe*, voyaging around Atlantic Canada. The prize includes flights, full-board accommodation, all transport and activities. To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following:

Q: The Latin name for the Atlantic puffin is:

- a) *Fratercula arctica*
- b) *Uria aalge*
- c) *Sterna paradisaea*

To enter and for full terms & conditions, go to www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer to the *Wanderlust* office (address p2). The closing date is 11 February 2015. The prize must be taken on the 7-16 July 2015 departure. Flights are subject to availability and exclusions. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or sponsors.

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FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

■ Your Story

The expat's 'home'

Reader **Luke Darracott** contemplates his roots, via Maidenhead, Moscow and Madrid



The world. That place you call home.

So said the BBC advert that asked the viewer to learn more about their world. But it was right. The world was the place that I call home. Of course my real home is my town, the small, unimpressive town of Maidenhead that slinks off the River Thames. The house, my house, almost unchanged for 28 years. Berkshire, my green county, stuffed with small villages, grand houses and fields and fields and fields. That is the home of my history. But maybe Madrid is my home, or Moscow or, as purred by the BBC, the world...

I was home for a week, my first sojourn back to my country for eight months, and it got me thinking about the idea of home. Since age 18, I have rarely spent long in any one place. The first year of university I was in halls; the second was in a shared house in town; the third I split into six months in Alicante, five months in Voronezh, south Russia; finally, the fourth year, back in Bath.

But university is often like that. The first year after university I lived in Madrid in the hope of improving my Spanish; the year after I moved to Moscow with a view to doing the same for my Russian. The addiction to Spain had taken hold however, and I soon found myself moving back to Madrid where I remained for a further two years – my longest stint in one flat.

Then came an odd period. I had moved back to the UK to write a book and quickly fell back in love with my country. The summer was astounding: boat trips, Pimms in the sun, barbecues, friends, family, regattas. I decided I would have a stab at

getting a job in London. I lived at home and started a relationship with a girl living in Highbury. She was a wonderful human being, all goodness and wit, and someone who I will always feel ashamed of drifting away from. My head was for London but as the clouds of winter descended and the job opportunities didn't arise, my heart started speaking Spanish to me again.

I returned to Spain, forced my way into a life of multi-job self-employment and moved into my own new flat. Another home. Eight months went by and, despite having the odd visitor here and there, I was once again relegated to my own personal Iberian world of disconnectedness. And there I remain. Happy, more or less.

Among the holidays where I half treat myself – adding fuel to the intense desire to travel – and also half 'force' myself to 'work' by eating and seeing as much I can to better comprehend the country in which I'm dipping my toes, there came the need and desire to go home, to that house in Maidenhead, to see my family and my friends. As Shakespeare said, 'there's the rub'. Therein it lies. Home, my home, at home, feels like home, Home Sweet Home, going home. All these expressions, but so many places. So to Maidenhead I went, greeting my parents with hugs, readying myself to dive back into my old life. It's harder than you think, and harder than they think.

To many my lifestyle appears some glorious sun-soaked holiday. Living in a pretty European capital where I spend my days eating tapas and sipping the best wines looks like I have it easy. And maybe I do, but I designed it that way; it wasn't luck. Coming 'home' is as blissful as it is bittersweet. You



Home, sweet homes...
For Luke, is it Madrid? Or a town on the Thames?

come back for a week or maybe less and have to get your fill before you leave it all behind for God knows how long again.

A morning jog through autumnal country paths under a cracked sky. Little reflective pools of heaven gather on the ground in impressions made by years of tractors; the Thames, that most handsome of rivers, reminds you how lucky you are to belong to this part of the country. In the middle of the morning my mother and father call me for coffee and cake. Elevenes in the warm and dim living room looking onto my childhood street. Then lunch made from whatever lies waiting in the fridge. Maybe afternoon tea rears its head as well as the promise of a neighbourly visit. Dinner round the table and a pint in the Grenfell Arms with my brother. Then the weekends with friends. Reconnecting with my oldest and best as if I had been with them all these months; jokes, insults, jibes and nothing too deep. If superficial, a trip is pure paradise. But probing can lead to pain.

My life in Spain is not linked to that of my friends. People I've known for more than 20 years trundle along in their lives without my involvement. I miss weddings, birthdays, stag-dos and that general warm feeling of having them at hand. They do these things

but I don't see them. I may get the news in passing or sporadically see a photo on the internet that belies a larger event. I am out of the loop and it is very much my doing.

Having a group of friends who are, to their credit, not addicted to their mobiles or social media, doesn't help me either. Relationships start and progress and culminate without my knowledge. Wedding vows, engagement parties, new partners, break ups. The whole tapestry of love is woven in another country and I am on the sidelines. Though I have my life and friends in Spain, I still miss those of my 'home'.



The Spanish would look on aghast if I told them how often I see my family. Parents and brother a few times a year. Grandma and uncle? The same or less. In the sense that we would do anything for our family members we are as united and knit as any Spanish family, but in the sense of 'closeness' who can tell. We don't see each other. We are bound by love and blood. To return and see your elder relatives every time older is not nice. To see the mind of a loved one fade is terrible, but to see the progression in bursts of eight-month periods is shocking. In truth, a lot of us younger expats live in fear that one day we'll get that bad news phone call; our hearts miss beats if we get a message from a parent saying 'call, it's urgent.'

All is not doom and gloom. In general when I go back it is a period of unmatched relaxation, overeating and blissful reunions. But also, there is a current of sadness that flows under the feet of many young expats. Yes, the world is our home. Yes, our desire to travel and explore needs to be sated. Yes, I love Madrid and can't see myself existing anywhere else right now. But never forget that for many of us home is still that little house in that small town sidling the Thames.

Post your own travel tale on:

wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust ►



LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, safari-ing in Swaziland, a leap into Kurdistan, glorious Namibia, lava-loving in Scotland, polar bear posing

★ STAR LETTER ★

Untrodden spots

Having read the excellent article by Lyn Hughes on her travels in Iraqi Kurdistan [*issue 138, Jul/Aug 2013*], I booked my flights in 2014.

I almost gave up when the news of the Islamic State insurgency reached us. For four months I followed the news in both UK and Kurdish media to try to gain some understanding of the situation. In the end I decided to give it a go. It felt like a big leap of faith for a solo female traveller and I was still hesitant ten minutes before boarding an overnight bus from Diyarbakir to Erbil.

I am so glad I did get on that bus. Kurdistan was very peaceful and people were as friendly and hospitable as Lyn had described in her article. Soldiers and other officials at the checkpoints did not seem bothered by tourists; very rarely was I asked to even show my passport. I visited Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Koya and Dukan. Bustling bazaars, floodlit fountains, picnics and children playing in the parks could not be any further from the image of a war-torn country.

I'd also like to say thank you for publishing the brilliant article on North Korea [*issue 151, Nov 2014*]. It brought back memories from my own stay in that country two years ago when I visited all the places the author writes about.

I am particularly grateful for the kind words about the North Korean guides, regarded by



A big thank you

I just wanted to say thank you for giving us the opportunity to experience a memorable holiday in Swaziland, through winning

your competition [*issue 143, Feb 2014*].

We took our trip last month and it really was unbelievable. Our story was even featured in the national papers! This

picture was taken at our second game reserve. I'm the one in the back, in the cream jacket and hat; my wife is in the front next to the driver.
John Chapman, Bucks

many as people deprived of intelligence and feelings, which I know is far from the truth. I'm also glad the author clarified the rumours about the leader's hair style, which – according to the Western media – all North Koreans were supposed to adopt. I would hate to think that was true!

Kasia Nowak, London

Clothing debate: a final word

There have been a couple of issues now where my suggestion that women should have the freedom to wear what they choose has been attacked on the Letters page. I have been called foolish and naïve.

I certainly do not consider myself foolish or, indeed,

culturally insensitive. I have travelled quite widely and dress appropriately for the country in which I am travelling.

The original article wasn't specific about travelling in certain areas of the world but rather the advice was for solo women travellers wherever they might be. It is a sad indictment of society today that the prevailing attitude is that women bring trouble upon themselves by choosing to wear certain clothing.

Finally, I don't "inflict" my culture on those in other countries. Rather, I choose to try and change things by sponsoring girls through charities such as Plan, to try to give them education, respect and freedom.

Karen Robb, via email

WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time, congratulations to Kasia!



Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



Namibia
Wanderlust reader
Elizabeth Layhe
has just returned
from a Namibian
adventure...

The highlights: Our three night stay under canvas in Etendeka on the edge of the Namib desert. Our guide Bonny was fantastic as was our host Denis. The walks were the best bit.

Must see: Etosha wildlife, The Etosha Pans and AfriCats at Okonjima. In fact: everything.

Top tip: Be careful driving. The roads are mainly empty but apparently there are accidents and the car hire companies will take a lot of money off you.



Always photograph your 4x4 before you go and on return.

Cautionary tale: Don't think kilometres, think time. The roads are good but mainly gravel and distances are longer than you think. Don't drive at night.

I wish I'd known... About the dust! Take nasal spray and keep your sinuses clear.

Anything else? Just go there and love the peace and tranquillity. It is a piece of Africa still mainly undiscovered and relatively safe.

This month you have been mostly...

W Wandering the atmospheric ruins of ancient hilltop

Pergamon (Turkey) in the fading afternoon light, with hardly a tourist in sight. [Markymark983](#)

T Extremely excited that one of my shots made it to the next round of judging in Wanderlust's Photo of the Year. Whoop! [@bethann_photo](#)

W Seeing an aurora display in Iceland. It lasted nearly two hours and was breathtaking. It was only after the lights had calmed down that I realised how cold I was: I couldn't feel my feet. [Roovilla](#)

f Giving advice on South America: Don't miss Guamote's market when in Ecuador. [Stephen Wolstenholme](#)

T It's thanks to magazines like @wanderlustmag that

I struggle to save. Always dreaming of my next trip! [@RobWildey_](#)

f Seeing stars: stayed in Monument Valley a few years ago, incredible skies! [Paul Smith](#)

T Lava loving: the Ardnamurchan volcano ring is impressive from the air! Well worth a visit. [@mrjamesdwebb](#)

W A trip to the Bronx led me to some charming elderly Italians in Arthur Avenue and the delights of Bronx Zoo and the New York Botanical Gardens. [Julia69](#)

f My first Kendal Mountain Festival was a good'un, especially hearing from Wanderlust editor Phoebe Smith. [Cumbria Live](#)

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Perfect posing makes for a bear-illiant shot

[Andrew Watson](#)

The photo was taken on a trip to Spitsbergen (Norway), late one night/early one morning – 24-hour daylight is so great for photography. The mother and cub joined us towards the end of dinner and there was a rush to set up on deck, but we need not have worried because they were kind enough to spend about two hours with us, wandering around our ship, the *Akademik Shokalskiy*.

I felt very fortunate to catch the moment as, in that entire time, the cub only stood up once for a few seconds.



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Kumbh Mela, India

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

Fancy joining a party of 100 million people? India's Kumbh Mela is a festival like no other – a mass of ritual bathing, naked sadhus, flashing lights and spiritual cleansing. We enter the fray...

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **MARK STRATTON**





Through the gate
(left to right) The darkness gives the festivities a smoky atmosphere; giving alms is a crucial – and gratefully received – part of your spiritual journey; (previous) the multitudes gather at the Ganges



‘After an hour hiking alongside the Ganges, what loomed ahead was a sight that could’ve been either a music festival 50 times larger than Glastonbury or an immense refugee humanitarian crisis’



“H

are Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare...” All night long. Over and over and over again. They were driving me crazy.

When I rose at 5am, the chant

had burrowed so deep into my subconscious I was considering shaving my head and taking up the tambourine. Instead, I unzipped my tent, yawned and gazed onto the Ganges. I couldn't make out the opposite bank of India's most sacred river because its silvery flow coalesced with a bleached sky to form one milky full-framed horizon. A phalanx of cormorants skimmed by; a black kite lurched overhead, swooping and rising. Then I heard it.

Despite being 5km upriver from the city of Allahabad, location of the 2013 Kumbh Mela, I could hear it. Now, the Hare Krishnas had been subsumed into a distant cacophony of devotional singing, arriving trains, gridlocked buses, beating tabla drums and the flute-trill of a thousand snake charmers. All underpinned by the murmur of a million people.

“We're walking to Allahabad,” said Rajiv, a Delhi pilgrim from the tent nextdoor. “Come and join us.” I downed a milky sweet chai from the mess tent and we set off along the Ganges. Allahabad is so congested by pilgrims that I was lodged upriver in a temporary camp. Walking was the only way in.

Sacred cities

Kumbh Mela attracts vast crowds of Hindus from across India. I'd visited the previous Kumbh Mela in Haridwar in 2010 and been swept along by a single day's crowd of 11 million pilgrims.

Occurring four times during an astrologically determined 12-year cycle, each two-month long *mela* (‘gathering’) commemorates an ancient Hindu story. Thousands of years ago a sacred elixir of immortality (*amrita*) spilled from a pitcher (*kumbh*) during a celestial struggle between demons and gods. The elixir fell on four sacred river cities that now alternately host the Kumbh Mela: Allahabad (Prayag), Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik. It's at these sanctified locations that pilgrims come to perform bathing rituals, believing they will wash away sins and hasten the breaking free from *samsara* (the cycle of reincarnation) to achieve *moksha* – final unification with the universal God, Brahman. Acquiring knowledge and karma, giving alms and practising meditation further this spiritual quest. ►

◀ Crowd control

After an hour hiking alongside the Ganges, what loomed ahead was a sight that could've been either a music festival 50 times larger than Glastonbury or an immense refugee humanitarian crisis. Stretching tens of kilometres across an exposed floodplain east of Allahabad was a temporary canvas-and-tarpaulin city. Its skyline was pierced by great tented ashrams with towering fake facades built to resemble Mughal forts and Taj Mahals.

Around these camps, swollen crowds marched, waving giant flags and tridents (the symbol of Shiva). I became embedded amid a thousand-or-so orange-robed pilgrims chanting and singing, and passed a dreadlocked sadhu with both legs tucked behind his neck. An elephant daubed in swastikas manoeuvred deftly through us all.

Braiding rivers of buffeting pilgrims were flowing in one direction: towards the mela's epicentre at the sacred Sangam. Here, the Ganges, sluggish in low season, meets the River Yamuna, which arrives from

Delhi. It's at this confluence that the amrita fell. Local legend even claims a third unseen river flows beneath both – the Saraswati, which manifests as a goddess of knowledge. Everybody wants to bathe here.

It was only 8am yet tens of thousands besieged the Sangam's exposed sandy riverbank; many had made long pilgrimages across India to be here. Mark Twain experienced this energy when he visited the 1894 mela. 'It is wonderful,' he wrote, 'the power of a faith like that, that can make multitudes upon multitudes of the old and weak and the young and frail enter without hesitation or complaint upon such incredible journeys.'

Most pilgrims were in a state of undress. Men were stripped down to their underpants, while women entered the Ganges in full saris, which they later dried by holding them to the wind like kites. Some devotees meditated cross-legged, oblivious to the surrounding brouhaha. Others recited invocations, scooping up Ganges water in brass puja pots before allowing it to cascade downwards. Youngsters frolicked as



if enjoying a beach holiday. The noise deafened: yelling and laughter; ululating women; vendors touting candyfloss; whistling policemen vainly attempting to enforce some crowd control.

I saw familiar faces from my last mela including Saroj, a sadhu who balances a calabash of sacred water on his head for 18 hours a day. He'd changed. Last time he bore a vase of flowers. He was symptomatic of everybody seemingly doing his or her own thing, the meaning of which can seem baffling to non-Hindus. I met Dr Charak, a Delhi physician, who explained that pilgrims might follow any multitude of rituals and prayers prescribed by teachers and scripture. The merit from these rituals intensifies during the Kumbh Mela's auspicious timing, he explained: "I'm not a particularly religious man, but I trust the ancient sages' wisdom about the relevance of astronomical factors at auspicious events like the Kumbh."

I didn't fancy putting this concept of unquestioning belief to the test. The Ganges looked grimly stagnant, awash with floating debris

such as sopping marigold garlands and frivolously discarded undies. Yet those returning from their dip radiated energised smiles. I asked the sopping doctor how he felt after his.

"I feel the immense faith and sacred thoughts of millions generating powerful benevolent vibrations, so you come out of the water feeling spiritually, mentally and physically rejuvenated," he replied.

Going with the goddess

I traipsed onwards across the sandy floodplain towards the Yamuna's northern bank, slaloming through a tide of buoyant bathers who were flowing towards the Sangam. My progress was slow; I stopped repeatedly to pose for photographs – in this industrialised city, which rarely features on holiday itineraries, foreigners are a novelty.

That said, Allahabad has one very noticeable attraction: an impressively chunky fort overlooking the Yamuna, built by ►

Water features

Whether you're pouring it over yourself or wading into it (left, at Har ki Pauri ghat), at some point during Kumbh Mela you're likely to receive a soaking



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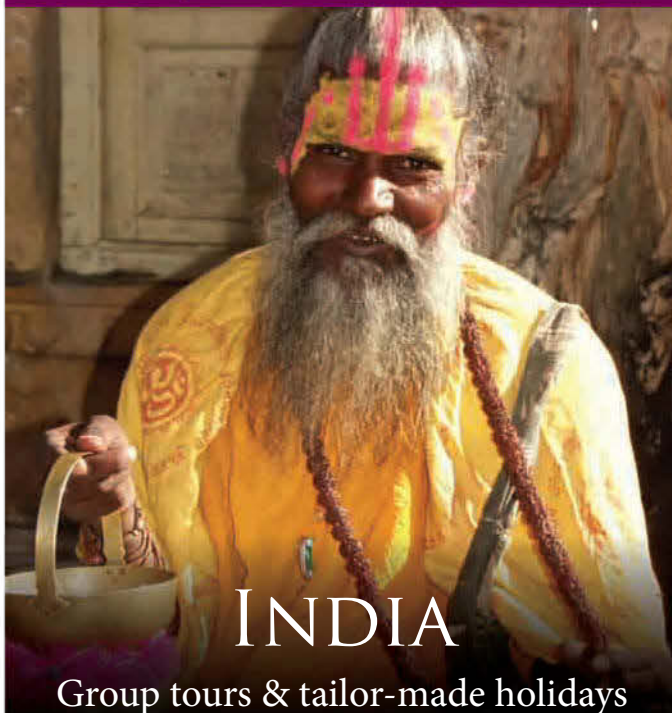
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Ashes to hashes
The sadhus – covered with ash – often dispense marijuana-flavoured wisdom

‘I watched Indian visitors queue for blessings from the naked sadhus, equally agog at their ghostly pallor, wild matted hair, tousled beards and faraway eyes’

◀ Mughal Emperor Akbar in 1583. A breakaway tributary of pilgrims poured through a gateway in the fort’s eastern wall and swept me into its 2,000-year-old underground Patalpuri temple. In this dark catacomb, I shuffled millipede-like past icons of elephant-headed Ganesh and wrathful multi-armed Kali.

The temple passageway exited near a well of murky sludge. “It’s the Saraswati River, the only place you can see it,” enthused one pilgrim. “Do you feel Goddess Saraswati’s energy?”

“Oh yes,” I lied. The toxic gloom below looked like a fast track to the next life.

Beyond the fort I took brief respite in the corporeal world, sipping gingery masala chai served in terracotta teacups and snacking on fried pakora triangles while watching a man who’d decorated his cow in sequinned cloth make a killing from baksheesh. A wailing drone nearby turned out to be a Wall of Death circus act. Motorcyclists careered centrifugally around a wooden velodrome that vibrated so much it looked like it might buckle at any minute.

Searching for sadhus

I ventured back onto the floodplain to seek Kumbh Mela’s most brazenly photogenic spectacle, the akhara camps. Sadhus are India’s most recognisable holy men: wandering ascetics who’ve renounced materialism and family to dedicate themselves to attaining moksha. Characterised by saffron and orange clothing, long beards and dreadlocks, several hundred thousand of them attend the mela. Akhara refers to loose groupings of them brought together by shared doctrine and deities.

A furious horn-blaring jam of auto-rickshaws and Ambassador taxis announced the akhara camps. Hundreds of pesky Hare Krishnas were holding up traffic, chanting and dinging cymbals in front of a portable shrine pulled by the two biggest oxen I’ve ever seen.

I asked a policeman if he knew the whereabouts of Juna akhara camp. He pointed the way, adding: “They like to keep hidden to preserve their decency but be careful because they can be fierce.”

He was referring to Juna akhara’s pre-eminent *naga babas* (naked sadhus). I had been captivated by their ferocity at the 2010 mela, when I watched thousands of these naked followers of Shiva parading, waving swords and tridents, as their leaders rode chariots.

A fug of marijuana smoke hung over Juna akhara, announcing these enigmatic ascetics’ predilection for THC-assisted ‘clarity’. Taking renunciation to the extreme, they sit naked in lotus position smeared in ash, mimicking Shiva for whom ash symbolised death and regeneration. I watched Indian visitors queue for blessings equally agog at the sadhus’ ghostly pallor, wild matted hair, tousled beards and faraway eyes. Some burned logs to keep warm; others conversed on unrenounced mobile phones.

It’s challenging to talk to them – and not just because they are stark naked, often with their penises looped around their waists like belts. The wisdom they dispense is cryptic; perhaps scrambled by repeated drags on marijuana-infused chillums. However, what some endure to express devotion defies belief.

I met one sadhu with a withered arm, atrophied because he’d kept it raised above his head for a decade; his uncut fingernails corkscrewed like springs. Another sadhu dozed upright, draped ▶



Smoke on the water
An arati ceremony at
the Har ki Pauri ghat

‘Pink-robed devotees swaddled themselves against the cold to watch their guru rotating a lit lantern; his single voice chanted a wistful refrain: “Hari Ganga”’

◀ over a suspended swing to support his ulcerated legs – he’d chosen not to sit down for eight years. Jhoola Baba had 21,000 needle piercings. The sadhus with 10m-long hair and 50-year-old beards were tame by comparison. Later I saw drunken Aghori, ascetics who shatter all of society’s taboos, from alcohol abuse to cannibalism of the dead at cremation grounds.

Something for the soul

Mooching around the camps (visitors are free to come and go), I bumped into Ravinder Singh, a Californian Sikh. He’d come to meet his spiritual guru, Baba Jagtarmuni-Ji, who – he alleged – performs miracles. “I’ve come back after 25 years to refresh my eternal spirit. Jagtarmuni’s wisdom will guide me,” Ravinder said. I was about to leave him to it when he added, “There’s no point coming here to walk around taking pictures. You must get something from Kumbh Mela for your soul.” Feeling shallow, I agreed to meet his Baba.

Jagtarmuni meditated beneath a spacious awning. We drank chai and ate sugary *ghee* sweets. His intensely watchful eyes, shaded under the precipice of a huge red turban, bore into me as we exchanged pleasantries. He wanted to know what I was seeking (dare I say great photographs?) before launching into a CV of his psychic abilities. “I was dying in a Mumbai hospital once, but left my body and existed in another for three years until my original healed.”

“He has the ability to levitate, he flew across the Ganges once,” interjected Ravinder.

It was all getting a bit weird. Then the grinning Baba pulled out a pot of black paste. “This will help you see clearer,” explained Ravinder. I bade farewell and left.

Mystic magic

Sunset. The camps had gone all Las Vegas. Ashram facades flickered into psychedelic lightshows of spinning hypnotic disks and rotating swastikas. I began my hour-long walk back to camp alongside the moonlit Ganges, glad to sink into darkening anonymity after the day’s sensory overdose. Trails of pilgrims trudged equally wearily, making their ways back to their camps. Some simply bedded down alongside the river.

For travellers to India, Kumbh Mela is the ultimate expression of an absorbing religion that makes this country such a vibrantly mystical experience. Mark Twain coined this appeal beautifully in *Following the Equator*: ‘In religion, all other countries are paupers. India is the only millionaire.’

Halfway back to camp an armada of tealights in folded leaf-boats drifted with the torpid Ganges flow. An arati, or invocation to the sacred river, was being performed. I sidled up alongside pink-robed devotees swaddled against the cold to watch their guru rotating a lit lantern; his single voice chanted a wistful refrain: “Hari Ganga”. It was a rare moment of low-key reflection since my early morning’s rude awakening. I vowed to return to the next mela in Nasik in 2015. To return to the greatest show on earth. 📷

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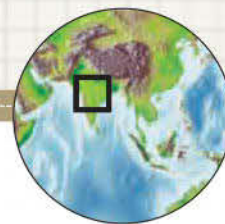
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Kumbh Mela, India Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: New Delhi
Population: 1.24 billion
Language: Hindi; English is widely spoken
Time: GMT+5.5
International dialling code: +91
Visas: Required by UK nationals. Apply online at <http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk>. A six-month tourist visa costs £92.20, incl fees.
Money: Indian rupee (Rs), currently Rs98 to the UK£. Most towns have ATMs. Keep a stock of small denomination notes for tips.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Monsoon season.** But also the time to visit the 2015 Kumbh Mela, held in Nasik, Maharashtra (north of Mumbai). Significant dates that attract the biggest crowds include: 14 Jul – Flag hoisting to open main ceremony; 14 Aug – Flag hoisting of the Akharas; 29 Aug – First Shahi Snan (auspicious bathing day); 13 Sept – Second Shahi Snan; 18 Sept – Third Shahi Snan.
 ■ Dry, cooler period; Tamil Nadu is wet. Best time to visit, weather-wise.
 ■ Heat and humidity builds.

Health & safety

A trip to Kumbh Mela requires endurance. Be wary of visiting on the main bathing days, when crowds are huge (fatal crushes occur every mela). Being exposed to great crowds also poses health risks. Be covered for polio, tetanus, typhoid, cholera, diphtheria, hepatitis A and possibly malaria and TB – consult your GP.

Further reading & information

India (Lonely Planet, 2013)
indiamike.com Discussion forums include Kumbh Mela
maharashtratourism.net Travel and accommodation options for Nasik mela
incredibleindia.org India Tourist Office

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/153 for links to more content:

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- ◆ Quick guide to Pushkar Camel Fair – online exclusive
- ◆ Ultimate Top 5 guide: Varanasi – online
- ◆ Dodging Delhi belly and other health risks in India – issue 74

PLANNING GUIDES

- ◆ India travel guide

THE TRIP

i Booking accommodation and trains during Kumbh Mela can be a huge challenge. **Transindus** (0844 879 3960, transindus.co.uk), which tailor-makes mela packages, can make the process much easier. For instance, a five-day package for Allahabad 2013, which included three nights at a private Kumbh Mela camp on a full-board basis, two nights in Delhi, train travel and transfers, cost £595 (based on two sharing). Transindus is also offering tailor-made packages to Nasik 2015.

Getting there

BA (0844 493 0787, ba.com) flies direct from London to Delhi from £645 return; flight time is 8.5 hours. For the next Kumbh Mela in Nasik the most accessible international hub will be Mumbai. BA flies London-Mumbai direct from around £600 return; flight time is 9.5 hours.

Getting around

Getting to the Kumbh Mela from India's international gateways is a logistical challenge. **The author travelled to Allahabad by train**, but for travel at this time Indian Railways tickets must be booked months in advance (indianrail.gov.in); achieving this online is akin to banging your head against a brick wall. Seriously consider getting a tour operator.

Nasik is four hours north of Mumbai by rail. Buses from Mumbai to Nasik take five to six hours and cost as little as £2; book in advance at redbus.in.

Cost of travel

India remains very affordable, however **Kumbh Mela causes significant price hikes for local accommodation**. Hotels and the camps offer all-inclusive deals with meals for £25-50 a day. **Food at the festival is inexpensive**: snacks (pakoras, samosas) cost £1-2; chai little more than 20p. Carry plenty of small rupee notes for *baksheesh* (alms) and tips. When using rickshaws or taxis, **agree a fixed price** before the journey.

Accommodation

It may be possible to book hotels in Nasik as late as six months in advance of Kumbh Mela. **Establishments will have upped their prices, and will most likely be offering all-inclusive rates.**

Another solution – and better for atmosphere – is to stay at one of thousands of camps. **Thar Camps** (tharcamps.com) ran the author's camp at Allahabad 2013, with comfortable well-appointed en-suite tents and all-inclusive meals. **Kautilya Society** (kautilyasociety.com) hosted a camp at Allahabad; contact them for information about Nasik.

INDIA: TOP 5 FESTIVALS

1 DIWALI Festival of lights, when candles, lamps and fireworks are lit to mark the start of winter.

Location: India-wide; particularly spectacular in Amritsar, where the Golden Temple is festooned with *diyas* (oil lamps), and Varanasi

Date: 11 November 2015

2 HOLI Fun, colourful Hindu festival of powder- and water-throwing, ushering in spring.

Location: India-wide; particularly colourful in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh

Date: 6 March 2015

3 PUSHKAR CAMEL FAIR

Touristy but wildly colourful spectacle of parading, caparisoned camels, done

with the distinctive Rajasthani style.

Location: Rajasthan

Date: 18 November 2015

4 NAVARATRI Alternatively known as Durga Puja, this extravagant nine-day celebration is dedicated to the feminine *shakti* (power) of goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati.

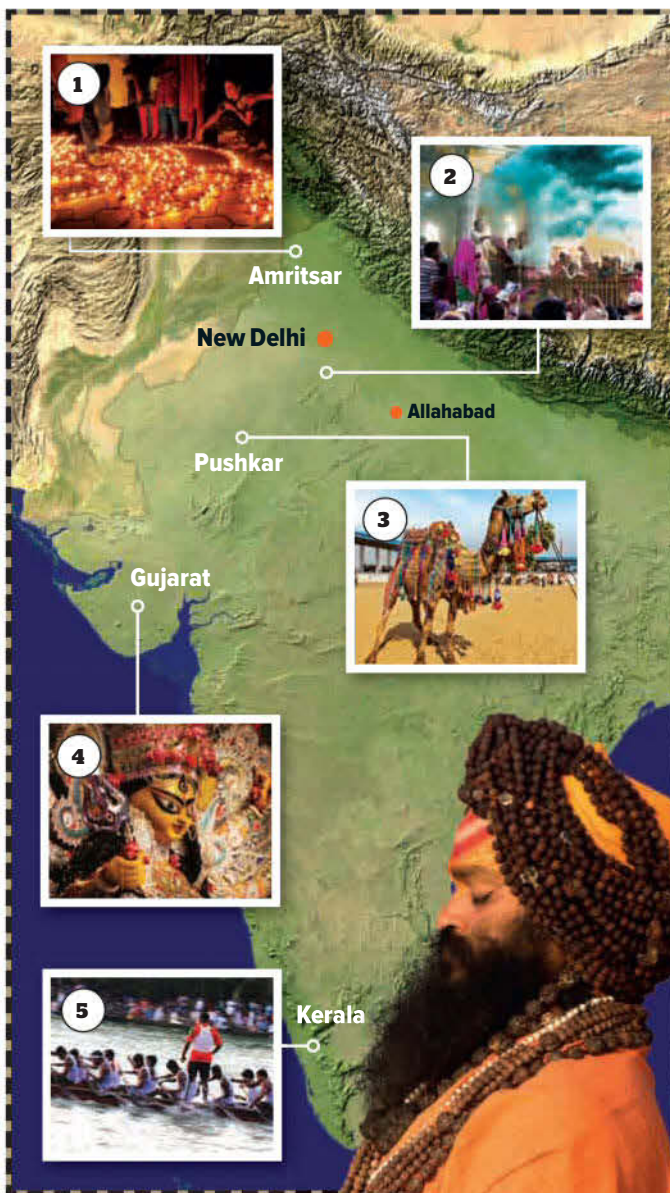
Location: India-wide; particularly full of colour, song and dance in Gujarat

Date: 13 October 2015

5 ONAM Harvest festival featuring special foods and snake-boat races, marking the homecoming of legendary historical king Mahabali.

Location: Kerala

Date: 28 August 2015



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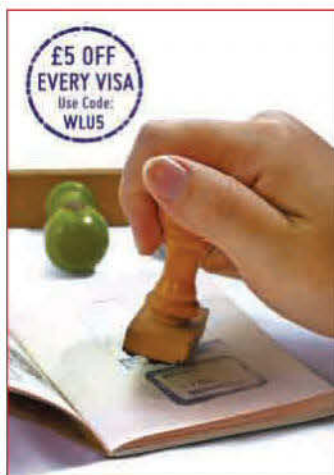
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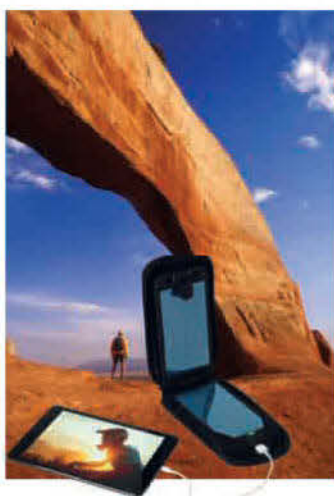
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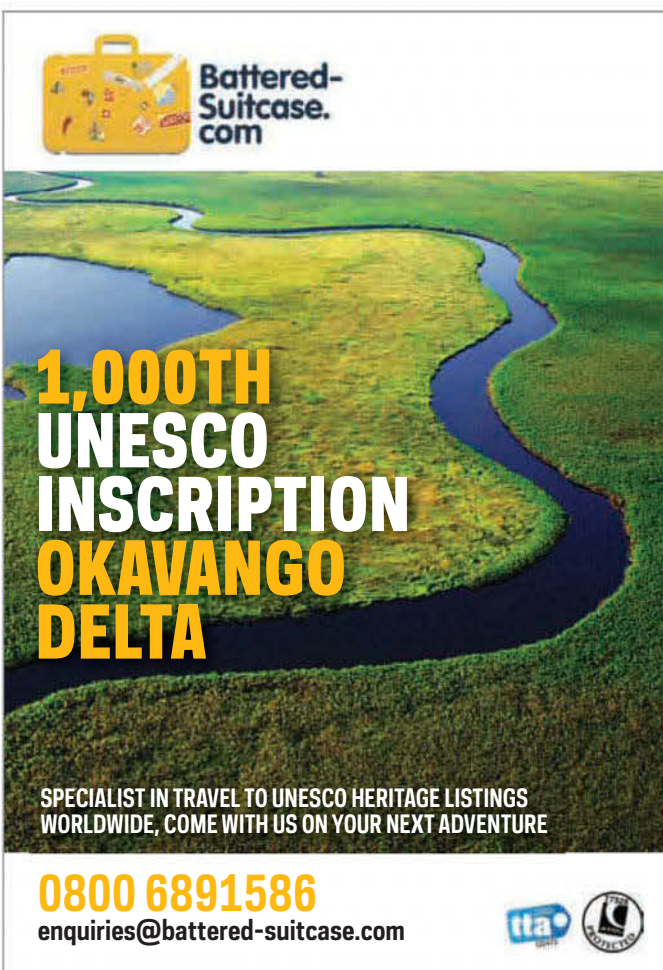
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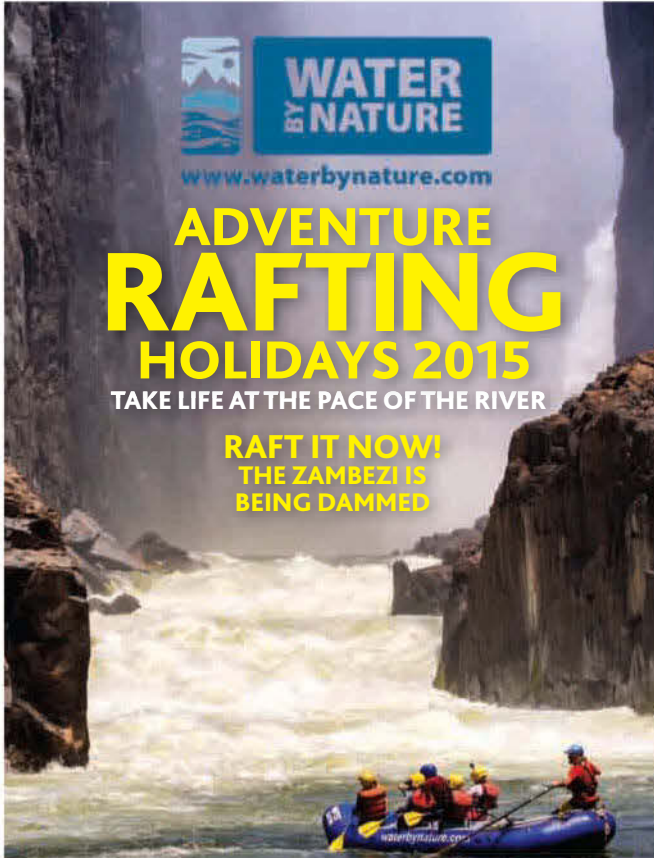
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How I got into Travel



Kevin Rawlins

Sales executive, Wanderlust Travel Media

As well as being an avid traveller, huge Arsenal fan, movie buff and keen foodie, Kevin makes up a key member of the *Wanderlust* sales team

How long have you worked for *Wanderlust*? Three years.

What did you do before and what attracted you to the job? I have always been in sales – from *Yellow Pages* to mobile phones – but the thought of working in the travel industry attracted me as I actually studied travel and tourism at college 20 years ago. It's taken me this long to actually get a job in the industry!

What is it like to work for *Wanderlust*? It's a blast... every day is full of surprises; I speak to companies all over the world and my clients have always got interesting travel tales to tell.

What do you like about being a sales executive? The feeling you get when you make a sale is amazing; it's what gets me up in the morning.

What challenges have you faced? The travel world is full of challenges, from clients being away a lot (apparently on business?) to hitting targets. But I like a challenge; life would be boring without them.

How has your career progressed at the company? Being a relatively small company it's quite easy to move up the career ladder quickly. I started as a junior only looking after a few clients; I'm now a sales executive looking after around 100, so a lot of responsibility! It's also helped with my time management and organisation.

Tell us about your *Wanderlust* career highlights/favourite moments so far? The travel shows – *Destinations* and the *Adventure Travel Show* – are always a lot of fun but hard work. I have also met some interesting characters like Paul Goldstein and Simon Calder who are just great to watch and loads of fun.

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Travel Company Tales



ATI Holidays

Charlotte Bond and David Cartwright
The dedicated travel duo behind ATI Holidays. Together they have three decades of experience in southern Africa holidays

How ATI started?

David and I had worked for almost four years in the heart of the Okavango Delta – an amazing experience. But after encountering snakes, buffalo and elephant daily, we felt it was time to move out of the bush. In 2002 we moved to Namibia and bought a practically dormant, small self-drive company called Africa Tourist Info, which became ATI Holidays.

Early challenges

Namibia was quite tame after the Botswana bush – for once I could shower without wondering whether I was going to receive a visit from the resident spitting cobra! But

starting a company always has its challenges, the biggest of which is finding enough time and money to move forwards. I only had a weekend of maternity leave with our first child – he was born on Friday night and I was back in the office on Monday morning. We have grown many grey hairs over the past 12 years, but it's worth it to see our guests returning from their safaris having fallen head over heels in love with Africa.

What makes ATI unique?

Despite our growth from two to twelve people, we are still a small company, offering excellent personal service, unsurpassed back-in-country, and a wealth

of local knowledge. Unlike our colleagues in the Namibian tourism industry, we have chosen to focus mainly on self-drive holidays. We also offer a wide range of luxury fly-in safaris, as well as guided tours.

But self-driving is where we excel. For years David and I travelled through Africa in our old beaten up yellow pick-up truck and we loved the freedom and adventure of travelling alone and unencumbered, choosing to stop along the way as the mood took us, and always being



amazed by the immense open spaces of Namibia. We realised we wanted to offer travellers the best of both worlds – adventure and freedom combined with the safety net of an experienced, professional tour operator just a phone call away.

Future plans?

We would love to focus on more speciality trips, offering milestone safaris based around special occasions like wedding events or family gatherings. Spending time with family and close friends is more of a luxury these days and we want to continue being part of creating amazing memories which will stay with our guests forever.

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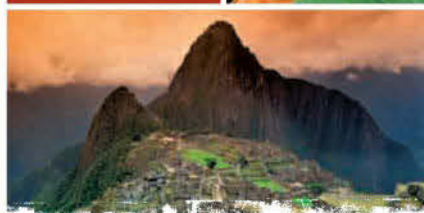
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Cambodia and Vietnam make quite a double act. Both have incredible cultural richness, frenetic-yet-fun cities and welcoming people. Both, too, have endured traumatic recent events – but emerged more dynamic than ever. Their similarities are fascinating but each has its own particular treasures, from Cambodia's matchless temples and aromatic *amok* trey catfish dish to Vietnam's UNESCO-listed town of Hoi An and fragrant *pho* soup.

To plan the ideal itinerary, it helps to have expert guidance – and **Rickshaw Travel** provides enriching trips to 24 destinations across Asia, Latin America and Africa, focusing on unusual destinations, characterful accommodation and cultural immersion. You get to travel independently and worry-free: all trains, buses and ferries are booked in advance and you get your tickets on arrival.

And this level of expert planning has gone into Rickshaw Travel's two-week Vietnam & Cambodia trip – which you could win...

COOL CAMBODIA

Getting to Indochina from the UK is a cinch. Vietnam Airlines, the national carrier of

Vietnam, flies direct four times a week from London Gatwick – two flights to Hanoi, two to Saigon. From July, Vietnam Airlines will introduce a state-of-the-art 787-900 series aircraft on the route.

From Vietnam, the must-see temples of Angkor are a short flight away. But Cambodia has more to offer than its headline site. Stay in a stilted house with a local Khmer family and head out to fish on Tonle Sap Lake, or take a tuk-tuk tour to local projects, combined with visits to temples few travellers see. And you can't leave without mastering *amok* (banana leaves) at a Cambodian cooking class.

VIBRANT VIETNAM

The most atmospheric way to get from Cambodia to Vietnam is by Mekong River boat, buying fruit from a floating market en route. It's a languid way to travel – unlike touring Ho Chi Minh City's streetfood stalls on the back of a Vespa: this thrill is the best way to uncover the city's secrets.

The pace slows again in Hue, where you can help tend the rice fields, and in Hoi An, where you can watch as hundreds of red lanterns light up the night from your riverside hotel – another heady, authentic experience to soak up on your diverse South-East Asian journey.



HOW TO WIN

Rickshaw Travel, in association with **Vietnam Airlines**, is offering you and a friend the chance to win a two-week trip to Vietnam and Cambodia. Just answer the following:

Q: What is the capital of Vietnam?

- a) Saigon
- b) Hue
- c) Hanoi

To enter (and for full terms and conditions), go to www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer, name and contact info to the *Wanderlust* address (p2), marked 'Rickshaw'. Prize valid for travel within the months of May, June, September or November 2015.

International flights must be taken from London Gatwick or London Heathrow (dependent on availability). Closing date: 11 Feb 2015. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.





Going for a jar
The jars on the plains outside Phonsavan continues to baffle and amaze

Plain of Jars, Laos

The curious Plain of Jars has puzzled archeologists for decades. Immerse yourself in the mystery of these stone vessels, then explore the countryside beyond

i Get orientated

Sometimes travel icons are big, sometimes they're beautiful, and sometimes they're just plain odd. The latter certainly applies to the Plain of Jars, the catch-all name for a large area of north-eastern Laos that's dotted with mysterious stone vessels. The jars' origins and purpose are unknown but, having been dated at over 2,000 years old, together they comprise one of the most important prehistoric finds in South-East Asia.

Thousands of these jars are scattered across 60 or so sites, only a few of which – due to unexploded devices from the Vietnam War – are safe to visit. They vary in height from 45cm to over 2.5m. Research has revealed human remains and burial offerings nearby, giving weight to the theory that the jars were used as funerary urns. Other hypothesis suggest they were used for storing grain or even wine.

The jars are fascinating, but so is the landscape in which they sit, a swathe of undulating crimson, brown and purple hills, part cloaked in pine and eucalyptus, and pocked with bomb craters – a stark reminder of the heavy fighting that the area suffered during the conflict.

✈ Getting there

There are no direct flights between the UK and Laos. Thai Airways (thaairways.co.uk) flies London-Vientiane via Bangkok from around £618 return; flight time is from 15.5 hours.

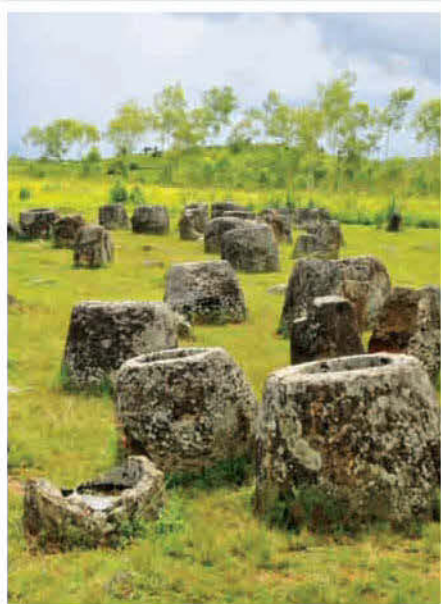
Trips to the jars run from the small town of Phonsavan. Lao Airlines (laoairlines.com) flies from Vientiane to Xiang Khouang Airport in Phonsavan; flight time is 30 minutes. Buses run daily between Vientiane and Phonsavan; journey time is around 11 hours.

🚶 The visit

There are more than 60 jar sites but only a few have been cleared of UXO (unexploded ordnance); of these there are three particularly popular locations: Thong Ha Hin, Hai Hin Phu Salato and Ha Hin Lat Khai. The trio can easily be seen in a day.

Tuk-tuks are prohibited from entering the sites, and private taxis or vehicles must be registered and have a special permit. Tours can be booked through guesthouses and agents in Phonsavan. A private tour will cost around US\$50-100 (£32-64); a group tour for up to six people costs around US\$20-30pp (£13-19). When touring the sites, stick to the marked paths.

While you're in the area, explore more of the north's striking mountainous scenery, perfect for trekking, rafting and mountain-biking. Also, head west to visit laid-back Luang Prabang and east for the Viengxay caves. ►



Plain amazing

The stone jars have puzzled archaeologists since they began researching them in 1930s. Human remains and burial offerings have dated the jars back to over 2,000 years ago, but local myth suggests that they held the victory booze for the king of the local giants that inhabited the area after one of his conflicts.



◆ Site 1 (Thong Hai Hin)

Containing 331 jars, this site is spread across a hillside. It also has the largest discovered jar, which local legend describes as the personal wine cup of the mythical giant king Khun Cheung.

◆ Russian tank

Damaged by extensive bombing during the war, can also be visited during a tour of these sites.



◆ Site 2 (Hai Hin Phu Salato)

This has a collection of 93 jars, which lie on two adjacent wooded hillsides. The highlight here is a jar with a marking resembling a frog. From this site it is possible to make trips to a nearby Hmong village.

◆ Site 3 (Hai Hin Lat Khai)

An attractive site located at the top on a hill offering scenic views, Site 3 lies on the outskirts of Ban Xieng Di, inhabited by the Phuan ethnic group. Nearby is a Buddhist temple and a stupa damaged during the war.



Tat Lang
Ban Xieng Di
Site 3



■ Essentials

Language: Laotian

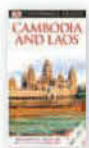
Time: GMT+7

Visas: Required by UK nationals. Buy a visa on arrival (US\$35) or apply in advance from the embassy in London.

Money: Laotian kip (LAK), currently 12,500LAK to the UK£

Health: Be up to date on regular vaccinations. Take out good travel insurance – medical care is basic.

This feature is adapted from the *DK Eyewitness Cambodia & Laos travel guide* (£15.99), the best visual guide to the country. www.travel.dk.com



Bomb craters

Some sites, such as Site 1, are located near spots where heavy bombing took place during the Vietnam War, and large craters are still visible. Of the 262 million cluster bombs dropped on Laos by the US, it's been estimated that around 80 million failed to explode and remain hidden underground. These continue to plague the area, though local projects have taken to recycling the metal into more useful items such as cutlery.



Latin capital?
Miami feels quite removed from the rest of the US



Miami, USA

Art deco, *Miami Vice*, white-sand beaches – but is there more to Florida's Spring Break mecca? **Phoebe Smith** stops off en route to Haiti to find out...

i Before you arrive

Perched on the south-eastern edge of the USA, both shielded by and built on the natural and manmade islands of Biscayne Bay, Miami feels somehow removed from the rest of the country. With a heritage largely shaped by years of Spanish, Cuban and later Haitian immigration, and sitting as close to Havana as it does to Orlando, it's not really surprising that Miami has earned the itself the nickname 'The Capital of Latin America'.

The influences of this varied historic influx can be seen across the city, especially when you look beyond the famous Art Deco architecture of trendy South Beach. Just west of Downtown is Little Havana; Little Haiti is further north. Here, on warm, tropical evenings, you can wander between salsa clubs, eat empanadas, hear whispers of voodoo ceremonies and listen to the locals speaking a blend of Spanish, French and Creole.

It makes sense, then, that Miami International Airport is not only a gateway to Florida but a key transit point for those heading onwards to South America and the Caribbean. And while it may be tempting to carry on your journey without stopping off to explore, don't be too hasty. Spend a day in multicultural Miami and you might feel like you've left American soil already.

✈ At the airport

Flights from the UK usually arrive at the central hub of Miami International (MIA), about 8km from the city centre. Flights from within the US, particularly budget carriers, generally land at the smaller Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, 40km north of downtown.

At MIA you'll need to pass passport control, then US Immigration and Customs – you will be given a customs form to fill in on the plane, which will be stamped here. Queues can be lengthy.

🚌 Getting into town

The Miami Beach Airport Flyer bus will whisk you from Miami International to South Beach for \$2.35 (£1.50). It runs every 30 minutes, 6am-11.40pm; journey time is about 30 minutes.

Taxi fees are fixed: the ride from the airport to South Beach costs \$32 (£20); to downtown costs \$22 (£14). A cheaper option is to pre-book a shared shuttle with SuperShuttle (supershuttle.com); a one-way trip costs from \$15pp (£9.50).

🚌 Other ways to arrive

Miami has four Greyhound bus terminals including one at the airport (greyhound.com). Buses run daily from many US cities such as New York (30hrs) and New Orleans (22hrs); an NYC-Miami fare can cost as little as \$89 (£57) one way.

Amtrak trains run into Miami Train Station (8303 NW 37th Ave). Miami is the terminus of the east coast Palmetto service from NYC. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

Population: 420,000

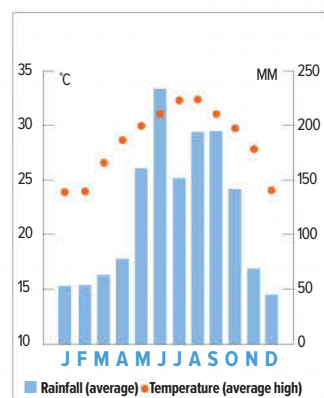
Language: English, Spanish, Creole

Timezone: GMT-5 (Mar-Nov GMT-4)

International dialling code: +1

Visas: Not required by UK nationals. You will need to obtain an ESTA before arrival (<https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta>); these cost \$14 and are valid for two years.

Currency: US dollar (\$), currently around \$1.56 to the UK£. ATMs are readily available. Credit cards are widely accepted. Tipping is expected.



Best viewpoint: The most classic view of the city has to be from a boat out in Biscayne Bay.

Health issues: The sun is strong here – be sure to use high SPF sunscreen. The hurricane season is June–November.

Recommended guidebooks:

Eyewitness Top 10 Travel Guide: Miami & the Keys (DK, 2013); *Miami & South Florida* (Rough Guides, 2008); *Miami & the Keys* (Lonely Planet, 2008)

Web resource: discoveramerica.com; miamiandbeaches.com

Climate: Tropical. Hot and humid (32°C+) in summer; December–May is more bearable and less storm-prone.



TOP TIP

Be careful when exploring the city: muggings and persistent beggars can be an issue. Take the usual precautions (eg conceal valuables such as cameras) and don't wander alone at night in Little Haiti.

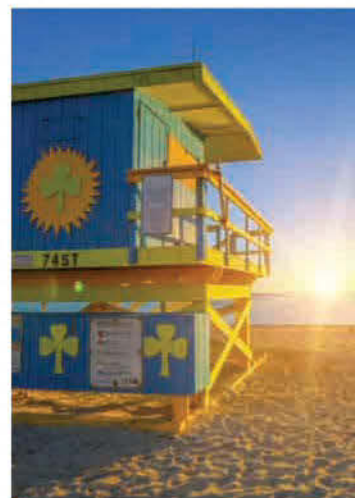
■ First Day's Tour

Start the morning with a stroll on **South Beach** – this iconic stretch of sand is where the health conscious come for an early run while last night's revellers stumble home. Grab breakfast at **The Front Porch Cafe** (1458 Ocean Drive; frontporchoceandrive.com).

Next, explore the **Art Deco buildings**. You can do this alone but taking one of the guided walking tours from the Welcome Center (1001 Ocean Drive; mdpl.org/welcome-center) will offer a better historical grounding.

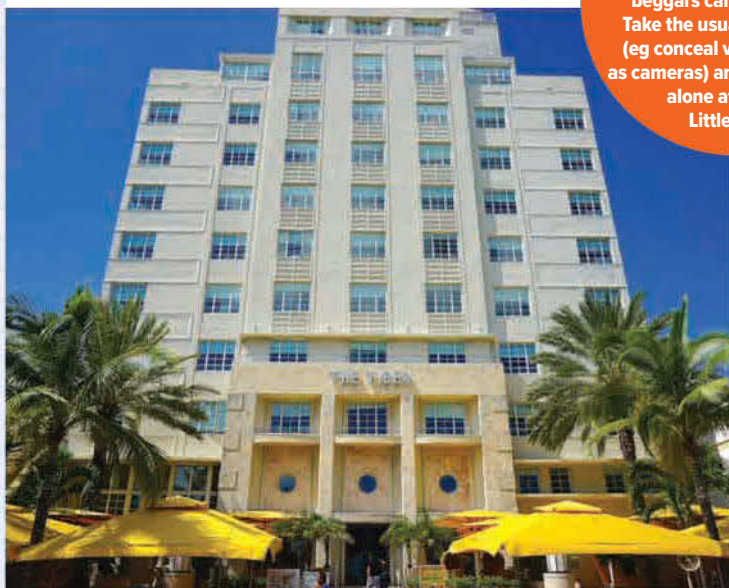
Take a bus to Little Haiti and head for the **Haitian Heritage Museum** (4141 NE 2 Ave; haitianheritagemuseum.org; call for opening hours). Learn about the city's Haitian diaspora – the largest population of Haitians outside the country.

If you want more insight into Miami's Latin American contingent, consider a trip to **Little Havana**, in particular SW 8 Street – locals call it **Calle Ocho**. Grab some Nicaraguan food from **Guayacan** (1933 SW 8 St), before calling at the **Bay of Pigs Museum** (1821 SW 9 St) to learn about the ill-fated 1961 invasion.



In the afternoon, cross the bridge to get over to **Key Biscayne** and **Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Recreation Area** for a meander among the mangroves and to visit the historic lighthouse.

As the sun sets, head back to South Beach for a slap-up Haitian meal – perhaps with a rum or two – at **Tap-Tap** (819 5 St; taptaptmiami.com).



■ Where to Stay

Top end: The Tides at South Beach (pictured above; 1220 Ocean Drive; tidessouthbeach.com) is the choice if you want to experience a touch of Miami luxury with a boutique feel. Think Art Deco vintage meets coastal cool, topped off with ocean views. Doubles from \$340 (£216).

Mid-range: The Princess Ann Hotel (920 Collins Ave Miami Beach; princessann.com) offers clean and simple rooms. It is just a short stroll away from South Beach

– but without the high price-tag that is usually attached to the hotels there. Doubles from \$139 (£89).

Budget: The Freehand Hostel (2727 Indian Creek Drive; thefreehand.com) is a reinvention of the historic Indian Creek Hotel, one of Miami Beach's classic 1930s Art Deco buildings. Just one block from the beach, it has both shared and private rooms. Dorm beds from \$28 (£18) pppn, doubles from around \$140 (£89).

■ Stay or Go

Stay, for day – but then head further afield. There's plenty more to see around the city.

For starters, there are two national parks within easy striking distance: **Biscayne** (nps.gov/bisc) and **Everglades** (nps.gov/ever). The former is a sprawling reef system where you can join guided canoe and kayak tours. The latter is the USA's largest subtropical wilderness, a vast network of mangrove forest and wetlands where you can enjoy one of the

most classic Florida experiences: watching alligators slice through the water and birds wading in the shallows as you zip by in an airboat.

Further afield is laid-back **Key West** and the quirky communities of the Florida Keys. These islands are ideal for cycling – the 122km **Overseas Heritage Trail** links them all together.

Finally, from Miami you can always jump on a plane, head south and explore the real Cuba, Haiti and beyond.

Byzantine bay
Sweeping views from the city's Byzantine walls, looking across the water to Mount Olympus



Thessaloniki, Greece

Ancient in origin yet young at heart, Greece's second city is full of hidden secrets, exceptional food, thriving bars and a laid-back spirit, says **Sarah Baxter**

Some say Thessaloniki is a city of fairytales; that it's an old lady with pockets full of sweets, which she hands out in her own time. It's certainly old: Greece's second city, and the capital of the northern Macedonia region, Thessaloniki was founded in 315 BC, named after the half-sister of Alexander the Great. And it is also a place of initially concealed pleasures. The appeal of a visit is not in Eiffel Tower-style headline sites but rather in the nooks and crannies – in those pockets.

Sloping down to the Thermaic Gulf, and located on the Via Egnatia (the Roman road linking the Adriatic to Istanbul), Thessaloniki has always been strategically important. After the split of the Roman Empire in the third and fourth century AD, it became the second city of Byzantium. It was sacked repeatedly over the following centuries, falling to the Ottomans in

1430. Perhaps most devastating, though, was the great fire of 1917, which destroyed hundreds of buildings. The result is a city centre largely reconstructed in the 1920s, with wide squares and boulevards, Byzantine flavours and the odd enduring nugget of ancient architecture.

However, for all of Thessaloniki's venerable history, it has a young heart. It held the tenure of European Youth Capital in 2014 – but it's a city for youth year-round, every year: with two universities, it has the largest student population in Greece and one of the biggest in south-east Europe. This gives the city a tangible buzz, and a whole lot of eating and drinking options: allegedly, Thessaloniki has the most cafés and bars per capita on the continent. Chief among its pleasures are drinking very good coffee on a sunny terrace, looking across to Mount Olympus across the bay, or sipping a *tsipouro* (grape brandy) until the wee hours in a hip new bar.

So, yes, while it is a city that appreciates its history – a city where you can search out Roman triumphal arches, seventh-century mosaics and Byzantine walls – it continues to look forwards too. Its mayor, Yiannis Boutaris, who was voted in for a second term in 2014, is a tattooed, maverick, non-partisan, bike-riding recovering alcoholic who has ripped up the political rule book. He has reformed local government; he's encouraging the multiculturalism that was so embraced in the past but which has been recently stifled; and he's a big advocate of increasing tourism, envisaging a Barcelona-style reinvention of his port-side city.

And why not? Thessaloniki doesn't have Gaudí, but it has a wide waterfront, a maze of wanderable streets, a passion for food (with many local specialities), fine beaches just a bus ride away and a laid-back spirit that locals call *halará* – no rush, no worries, take things as they come: enjoy. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

When to go: Thessaloniki can be visited year-round. Summers are hot and humid. Winters can be cold, chilled by the northerly Vardaris wind; however, this clears the skies for good views of Mount Olympus.

Getting there: Several airlines fly UK-Thessaloniki direct; flight time is under 3.5 hours. easyJet (easyjet.com) flies from Gatwick and Manchester; one-way fares start from £25.99.

Getting around: Thessaloniki is fairly compact, though hilly away from the waterfront. To get into the city from Macedonia International Airport, take bus 78. Journey time is 30-40 minutes; one-way fares cost €2 (you need change to buy a ticket from the machine on board).

Alternatively, a taxi will cost €20-30. **Where to stay:** Well-located in the centre, The City Hotel (cityhotel.gr) is a contemporary, stylish option; doubles from €70 (£55). If you need to stay nearer the airport try the

five-star Hyatt (thessaloniki.regency.hyatt.com), which has a pool and a complimentary shuttle service to and from the city centre and the airport; doubles from around €150 (£119).

Where to eat: Where *not* to eat? Recommended spots in this foodie city include: Estrella (Pavlou Mela), a café doing crazy things with traditional foods; Elenidis (Dimitriou Gounari), the no-frills bakery from which to buy your super-sweet *trigona panoramatos* cream-filled triangles; Konstantinidis (Mitropoleos 119), venerable old patisserie, where a piano is played 5pm-10pm, Fri-Sun; Mon Frere (cnr Karolou / P Koromila), a stylish café; Ouzeri Agora (Kapodistriou 5), for excellent seafood; Coq au Zen (Valaoritou St), an atmospheric French-style bistro.

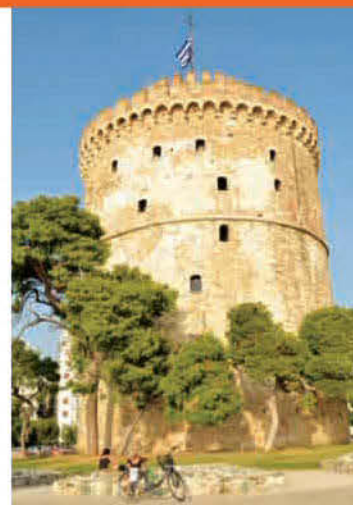
More info: enjoythessaloniki.com; visitgreece.gr

Day 1: WALK THE PORT

First, grab a *koulouri* – pretzel-like sesame dough rings, which originate from the city. They're sold from street corner carts (60¢) and will fuel a food-and-history stroll.

Start at the eighth-century **Agia Sofia**, modelled on Istanbul's great basilica; search out the quiet **Church of St John** at the south-east end and buy a *pouraki* (cigar-shaped choc waffle) from nearby **Hatzifotiou**.

Head east to the third-century AD **Rotonda** (a former mausoleum with fine mosaics), then walk south to the **Arch of Galerius** (AD 300). Continue down pedestrianised Dimitriou Gounari to the **Palace of Galerius** on Navarinou Square, the ruins of which can be viewed from the balcony at cosy **Loxias café** (Isavron 5). Soon you'll hit the waterfront and the city's symbol: the Ottoman **White Tower** (pictured). Once a prison, it now houses a museum with good views from the top.



The regenerated **waterfront** reopened in late 2013; 5km of shore has been refurbished. Facing the water, turn left to stroll to the Concert Hall, via 12 new thematic parks. Or go right towards the port, pausing at **Aristotelous Square** – a drink atop the **Electra Palace Hotel** offers fine views. Finish at **Kitchen Bar**, set in a converted warehouse next to the **State Museum of Contemporary Art** on the spruced up port. Here, you're well-placed for the **Ladadika** area, crammed with buzzy bars.

TOP TIP

Check church opening hours before you visit – admission times vary between sites; some close on Monday afternoons, or for a few hours at midday. Always dress appropriately – shoulders should be covered.



Day 2: HEAD UP

Start early, perusing the produce at **Modhiano and Kapani markets** – olives, fish, herbs, cheese. You might want to breakfast on *bougatsa* (filo pastry filled with semolina cream) at nearby **Serraikon** (serraikon.com).

Head north-east to **Dikastirion Square** to visit **Panagia Chalkeon**, a comely Byzantine church surrounded by a flower garden. Further north, past the scrappy **Roman Forum**, is **Agios Dimitrios**, the church of Thessaloniki's patron saint, and one of the largest churches in Greece; it has an interesting crypt museum, early Christian sculptures and eighth-century mosaics.

Now get ready to sweat: it's uphill all the way to the city's **Ano Poli district**, where Ottoman houses – spared during the 1917 fire – line narrow streets; en route, nip into the handsome Profitis Ilias church.

While in the Upper Town (also accessible via bus 23), visit **Vlatadon Monastery** (built on the spot where St Paul preached in AD 51) and the eerie **Eptapyrgio**, a Venetian fortress in the city walls that served as a prison until 1988. Parts of the walls still exist; they're best around the **Trigonion Tower**. Head back downhill via **Atatürk's House** – the father of Turkey was born here.

Day 3: SAND OR SITES

Options, options. If the weather's fine, you might want to do as the locals do and decamp to the beach. **Epanomi** is clean and sandy and accessible via local bus lines 69 or 70 (33km; 1hr). **Agia Triada** (25km; bus 72; 40mins) is a Blue Flag beach, and a good spot for sunsets.

The **Halkidiki Peninsula** – a popular holiday spot, famed for its turquoise waters – is further east, but just about doable for a day trip; buses from Thessaloniki's Halkidiki terminal take 1.5-2 hours to reach the nearer (and more developed) **Kassandra** area; **Sithonia** is prettier but slightly further away.

For a more cultural excursion, head west to **Pella** (regular buses leave from the main bus station; 40mins). Birthplace of Alexander the Great, Pella has a ruined *agora* [gathering place] and palace, exquisite mosaics and a modern museum that puts all the archaeology into context.

It's possible to combine Pella with **Vergina** (change buses at Halkidona), home to the Royal Tombs, where some burial tumuli date back to the 11th century BC. New discoveries are made all the time: in October 2014, researchers identified the bones of King Philip II, father of Alexander the Great (pictured above). 📷



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Intimate ape antics

Tanzania's Gombe Stream National Park is legendary. Ever since Dr Jane Goodall and Dr Louis Leakey began their pioneering research into the resident chimpanzees, the east African country has been synonymous with them. And, thanks to a new book – *Tales from Gombe* (Natural History Museum, £40) – we can all catch an intimate snapshot into their lives.

In it photographers Anup Shah and Fiona Rogers, who have spent much of the past decade at Gombe, have captured their antics on camera. Images like this of alpha male Faustino sharing fruit with young Siri, introduce you to the family dynamics and lures you into captivating tales of love, loss and relationships, intriguingly similar to our own.



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